

19. To Kill a Mockingbird

Screenplay by Horton Foote

Based on the novel by Harper Lee

About the writing of the film:

- Novelist Harper Lee won a Pulitzer Prize for the book *To Kill a Mockingbird*.
- Dill, the precocious visiting child in the film, is based on Truman Capote, Harper Lee's childhood schoolmate and neighbor.
- Similarities between Harper Lee's life and that of Scout Finch of *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Both had fathers who were attorneys; both were avid readers; Harper was six when the racially charged Scottsboro rape trials began, and Scout was six at the time of the trial in *Mockingbird*; her older brother was a playmate of Truman Capote, and Jem was a playmate of Dill, the character based on Truman Capote; both were avid readers at a young age. —Duluth Library bio of Harper Lee
- Horton Foote was asked to write the screenplay at the suggestion of the producer, who had bought the film rights to Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. “[The producer] said, ‘Harper doesn't want to do it.’ I had a long talk with her to discover we agreed on certain aspects of the story and decided to give it a go. When we got into it, we were having difficulty casting one role. My wife suggested a young actor we'd seen in my play *The Midnight Caller*. We tested him, and Robert Duvall got the part of Boo Radley.” —Horton Foote, quoted in *Hollywood Drama Logue*, 4/19-25/84
- When asked about the hardest aspect of adapting the novel for the screen, Foote replied, “I think rearranging the time sequence. In the book, if my memory serves me correctly, it's over a period of three years. Alan Pakula suggested that we think about doing it in one spring, summer, fall.” —*Call Sheet*, April 1994
- Harper Lee attended the opening day of shooting in February 1962. Gregory Peck later remembered that “there were tears on her cheeks. We finished the scene in one take, and I walked over to Harper, and I was thinking, ‘Oh, we just killed her, we just got to her something terrific,’ and so she said, ‘Oh, Gregory, you've got a little pot belly just like my daddy!’” —*Call Sheet*, April 1994
- “I'm an obsessive writer when I get started. I write morning, noon and night. I have terrible handwriting, which no one can make out, but I write all my projects with a fountain pen or pencil. I love to fill up notebooks with observations. For long stretches I have to stay solitary when writing. Anyone does... Lastly, I don't analyze the process too much. I just trust it.” —Horton Foote, *Hollywood Drama Logue*, April 19-25, 1984

About the writer:

- **Horton Foote**, who graduated from high school at 16, began his career as an actor, studying at the Pasadena Playhouse and then going to New York and working in off-Broadway theaters. In 1940, two of his plays were performed.
- In 1953, Foote wrote *A Trip to Bountiful* for television, then adapted it for Broadway, and eventually for the screen.
- Foote received a Pulitzer Prize for his play *The Young Man from Atlanta*.
- Foote received the 1962 Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. One of the other nominees was Robert Bolt, for *Lawrence of Arabia* (#14) [NOTE: The *Lawrence of Arabia* credit for Michael Wilson had not yet been restored; he would receive a posthumous nomination in 1995.]
- Screenwriting awards/nominations for Horton Foote: WGA Screen Laurel Award (1993); WGAE Evelyn F. Burkey Memorial Award (1989); WGAE Ian McLellan Hunter Memorial Award for Lifetime Achievement in Writing (1999); 3 Writers Guild Award nominations, with 2 wins, for *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Tender Mercies*; 3 Academy Award nominations, with 2 wins, for *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Tender Mercies*.