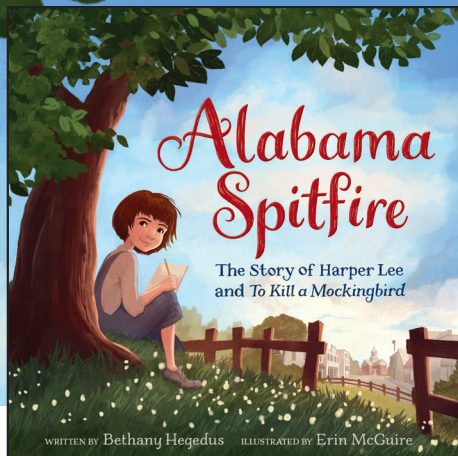


Nelle loved words ...
Words had weight.
Words held
meaning.

Author Nelle Harper Lee



Alabama Spitfire

BY Bethany Hegedus

ILLUSTRATED BY Erin McGuire

About the Book

What was Nelle Harper Lee like as a child? How did she become a writer? What was the inspiration for her renowned book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Bethany Hegedus shares fascinating details about Harper Lee's childhood growing up in a small Alabama town, her relationships with family and friends, how she became a world-famous writer, and how she chose to lead her life as a prominent, Pulitzer Prize-winning author.

Discussion Questions

- ❧ What is a "spitfire"? Do you know anyone like this? Why would you call that person a spitfire?
- ❧ How was Nelle different from her sisters?
- ❧ What did the author mean by "when it came to justice, separate was most definitely not equal"?
- ❧ What was Nelle's father's occupation? How did this affect her life?
- ❧ Why was Nelle's friend Truman targeted by bullies in the schoolyard? What did the two friends do together? What special gift did they receive from Nelle's father?
- ❧ When Nelle attended college, what made her different from the other girls?
- ❧ Why didn't Nelle finish law school?
- ❧ When Nelle moved to New York City, she reunited with her friend Tru. How did this affect her life?
- ❧ When Nelle began writing a novel, what inspired her? What details does she recall about her hometown? How do you think these sensory details enhanced her story?
- ❧ Describe Nelle's writing process. How long did it take her to write *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Why?
- ❧ How did Nelle feel about becoming a famous writer?
- ❧ What did the author mean by the closing sentence, "And *To Kill a Mockingbird* continues to do the speaking and fighting for her"?



Extension Activities

Do You Know Nelle? Spirited spitfire, faithful friend, literature lover . . . Ask students to describe Nelle Harper Lee, focusing on her personality traits and interests. Have students provide evidence from the text to support their descriptions.

Read About Writers. Ask students to choose an author they would like to study. As they research this author, ask them to learn about the author's childhood and journey to becoming a writer. What important people inspired this author? What experiences impacted their writing? Have students create a digital slideshow using presentation software (e.g. PowerPoint, Keynote, or Google Slides) to share their research with the class.

Weighty Words. The author writes: "Nelle loved words. She loved the sounds they made, how she could string them together to appease someone or to rile them up. Words had weight. Words held meaning." Ask students to think about the power of words. Can they recall powerful words, phrases, or sentences from books they have read in the past or speeches they have heard? Hegedus opens this book with Atticus Finch's famous line from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. ("You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.") Read it aloud and discuss its significance.