



**FACING
HISTORY &
OURSELVES**

CLASSROOM VIDEO • VIEWING GUIDE

EXPLORING JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE

Overview

English language arts teacher Alysha Bird has just finished reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* with her 8th-grade students and is about to study the story of the Scottsboro Boys, nine black teenagers falsely accused of raping two white women on a train in 1930s Alabama. Many believe the high-profile series of events was an inspiration for the story of Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

In this classroom video, Ms. Bird leads her 8th-grade students in a lesson that explores the nature of justice and the effects that barriers to justice in communities can have on the way in which laws are carried out. Prior to this lesson, Ms. Bird's students have read

pages 157–166 of *Teaching Mockingbird* (Handout 5.4, parts 1–5: The Scottsboro Affair). During the lesson, the students are divided into five small groups, and each group considers a different part of the Scottsboro Affair reading. In these groups, they consider questions such as the following:

- What is justice?
- Which characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird* would believe that justice was served in the repeated conviction of the Scottsboro Boys? Which characters would believe that justice had failed?



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- What similarities do you notice between the story of the Scottsboro Boys and the story of

Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird*? What differences do you notice?

Questions to Consider

1. This lesson is being taught in a middle school classroom. How might you adapt this lesson for a high school classroom?
 2. What is the value of using the novel as an entry point for a much broader, even philosophical, conversation about justice and judgment?
 3. What has the teacher done ahead of time to prepare for this lesson? What scaffolding might you need to provide to use this lesson in your own classroom context?
 4. At **2:15**, a student notes that the Scottsboro readings draw a distinction between the concepts of justice and closure. Why is this important? What purpose might it serve for students who are grappling with the outcome of Tom Robinson's trial?
 5. From **4:30** to **5:07**, a student describes community healing as akin to a "scar." He connects this physical healing process to that of our human capacity for forgiveness. How might you have responded to this student?
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Featured

Alysha Byrd

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Video Goals

- **Observe** students wrestling with issues of judgment, memory, and legacy in response to *To Kill a Mockingbird* and historical events in the American South in the 1930s.
- **Observe** a Facing History lesson plan in action.

Lesson Resources

- [*Teaching Mockingbird*](#) (pages 157–166)
- [The Scottsboro Affair](#)