

Harper Lee, author of To Kill a Mockingbird

1. Harper Lee based the character of Dill from *To Kill a Mockingbird* on the boy who lived next door to her as a child. That boy was Truman Capote. Harper Lee would later work as Truman Capote's assistant on his novel *In Cold Blood*, and served as the model for one of the characters in Capote's first novel, the 1948 work *Other Voices, Other Rooms*.

2. Her first name isn't actually Harper. 'Harper' is Harper Lee's middle name, and although it is the given name she used when publishing *To Kill a Mockingbird*, her first name is Nelle – her grandmother's name, Ellen, reversed (she decided against using Nelle as her nom de plume because she was worried it would be misread as 'Nellie' – and 'Nellie Lee' doesn't quite roll off the tongue).

3. The Beckhams' daughter is named after Harper Lee. In 2011, David and Victoria Beckham named their fourth child Harper Seven; the Harper is a homage to Harper Lee. David Beckham has revealed that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is Victoria Beckham's favourite book. Another child to be named after Lee is Harper Peck Voll, the Harper Lee 2grandson of the actor Gregory Peck; Peck became friends with Lee after he starred as Atticus Finch in the highly acclaimed 1962 film of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Peck would win a Best Actor Oscar for his performance).

4. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was written when one of Lee's friends bought her some time off work. In 1956, Harper Lee's friend Michael Brown and a number of other friends clubbed together and gave her a year's wages for Christmas: 'You have one year off from your job to write whatever you please. Merry Christmas.' She used the year off work to write *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

5. In 2015, 55 years after her first novel appeared, Harper Lee is publishing a second novel. In July 2015 – exactly 55 years to the month since *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published – Harper Lee's second novel *Go Set a Watchman* was published. It was actually written before *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but like a number of Lee's other writing projects to date, it was set aside for many years. Because of Lee's oft-stated conviction that she would not publish another novel, some have regarded the announcement of the book's publication with suspicion.

Until now, Lee's reputation has rested on her first and only novel, but it has done exceptionally well by itself: it won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1961 and has sold 40 million copies worldwide. In 2007 Lee was awarded the esteemed honour of the Presidential Medal of Freedom; in 2010, she was also awarded the National Medal of Arts.