

Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen

Standards Focus: Courtroom Terminology and the Judicial System

It is important in this section of *To Kill a Mockingbird* to understand the U.S. and Alabama Court Systems and how they work, as well as common courtroom terminology, so you will be able to fully understand the events that take place in Tom Robinson's case.

In the United States, each state has its own system of courts, which can vary greatly. In the state of Alabama, which is where the Tom Robinson case is held, the Superior Court has the authority to enact rules governing procedure within all courts. It is the highest court of the state, and is overseen by a chief justice and eight associate judges.

Below the Superior Court are the Court of Civil Appeals and Court of Criminal Appeals. These courts are designed to hear cases that have been appealed in lower courts, to decide whether they should move "up" to be heard by the Superior Court of the state. Cases which involve money go to the Court of Civil Appeals, and those involving a criminal act go to the Court of Criminal Appeals.

Below these courts is the Circuit Court, which deals with several different types of cases, including monetary disagreements, felonies, domestic issues, and juvenile cases. These cases are heard and decided by a jury. Beneath this court are the courts of limited jurisdiction, including Probate Courts, Municipal Courts, and District Courts, which deal with issues of adoption, misdemeanors, traffic violations, small claims, and preliminary hearings.

The federal government also has its own system of courts, which are designed to hear cases of federal crimes, cases that have been appealed after a Supreme Court decision, and those which bring into question issues involving the Constitution. At the top of this system is the Supreme Court of the United States, which consists of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and eight associate judges.

Below is a list of court terminology that you may find valuable when hearing about *Tom Robinson versus the State of Alabama*. Use a dictionary to look up each of these terms. Keep your list of definitions handy when reading Chapters 16 through 23.

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| 1. acquittal | 18. jury |
| 2. adjudication | 19. jury box |
| 3. appeal | 20. litigants |
| 4. "beyond all reasonable doubt" | 21. oath |
| 5. contempt of court | 22. objection |
| 6. conviction | 23. offense |
| 7. corroborating evidence | 24. overruled |
| 8. counsel | 25. proceedings |
| 9. cross-examination | 26. prosecution |
| 10. defendant | 27. rebuttal |
| 11. defense | 28. relevancy |
| 12. evidence | 29. subpoena |
| 13. expunge | 30. sustained |
| 14. hearings | 31. testify |
| 15. immaterial | 32. testimony |
| 16. indicted | 33. witness |
| 17. irrelevant | 34. witness stand |