

## Scout and Atticus

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Last week we began watching "To Kill a Mockingbird." The movie is narrated by a little girl called "Scout." "Scout" is a nickname, not the girl's real name. I think it's an unusual nickname. I've never met a little girl in the U.S. who was called "Scout." The word "scout" means "to look for something." So, perhaps Scout's father decided to call her "Scout" because she was always looking around for things.

Scout calls her father "Atticus." This is also unusual because "Atticus" is her father's first name and most American children don't call their parents by their first names. Dill, the little boy that Scout and her brother Jem meet early in the movie, wants to know why Scout calls her father "Atticus" because it's so unusual:

Dill: Why do you call you daddy Atticus?

Scout: 'Cause Jem does.

Dill: Why does he?

Scout: I don't know. He just started to ever since he began talking.

On the other hand, I have heard of other children calling their parents by their first names. As a matter of fact, my sister's children called her "Marti," which is her first name. Still, most American children call their parents something like "Mom" or "Dad."

In the beginning of the movie, a man named Mr. Cunningham brings some nuts for Atticus. Scout calls Atticus when she sees Mr. Cunningham, even though Mr. Cunningham says that there's no need to bother him. After Mr. Cunningham leaves, Atticus tells Scout not to call him the next time Mr. Cunningham comes. Listen to the dialogue:

Atticus: Scout, I think maybe . . . next time Mr. Cunningham comes, you better not call me.

Scout: I thought you'd wanna thank him.

Atticus: Oh, I do. I think it embarrasses him to be thanked.

Atticus is a very kind man and father. He would like to thank Mr. Cunningham for

the food that he brings him, but he can see that being thanked embarrasses Mr. Cunningham so he tells Scout not to call him next time. Now, let's listen to the rest of the conversation between Scout and Atticus to find out why Mr. Cunningham feels embarrassed when he brings food to Atticus's family:

Scout: Why does he bring you all this stuff?

Atticus: He's paying me for some legal work I did for him.

Scout: Why does he pay you like this?

Atticus: That's the only way he can. He has no money.

Scout: Is he poor?

Atticus: Yes.

Scout: Are we poor?

Atticus: We are indeed.

Scout: [Are] we as poor as the Cunninghams?

Atticus: No, not exactly. Cunninghams are country folks, farmers. Crash hit them the hardest.

Atticus is a lawyer and Mr. Cunningham was his client. As Atticus explains to Scout, Mr. Cunningham has no money and so the only way that he can pay Atticus is to bring food from his farm.

The "crash" that Atticus mentions is the stock market crash of 1929. The crash of the stock market was the beginning of the Great Depression, which lasted for about 10 years. This movie takes place in the 1930s, during the Great Depression.

During the Great Depression, food prices dropped. This hurt the farmers because they could not get much money for the food they produced. This is one reason that Atticus says that the crash hit the farmers the hardest. Another reason is that the farmers were already very poor before the crash of the stock market.

Now, let's study the dialogue in more detail.

Atticus: Scout, I think maybe . . . next time Mr. Cunningham comes, you better not call me.

When Atticus says "you better not call me" it means the same as "you had better not call me." In English, you can say "you had better do such-and-such" to mean "you should do such-and-such" and some people just say "you better do such-and-such," as Atticus did here.

When people speak they sometimes leave out words that they would include if they were writing. Atticus's leaving out the "had" in "you had better not call me" is one example of this. Another example is when Scout leaves out the word "are" in the question "Are we as poor as the Cunninghams?":

Scout: [Are] we as poor as the Cunninghams?

When people speak in informal situations, they also tend to pronounce two or more words together as one word, instead of saying each word clearly. For example, instead of saying "do not" people often say "don't." In the following sentence Scout pronounces "you would" as "you'd" and "want to" as "wanna."

Scout: I thought you'd wanna thank him.

In standard English, this would be "I thought you would want to thank him." When you speak, I recommend that you say "want to" because "wanna" can sound a bit childish, unless you are speaking very quickly. When you write, you should definitely write "want to," not "wanna."

Scout: Why does he bring you all this stuff?

Atticus: He's payin' me for some legal work I did for him.

"Legal" means having to do with the law. So, Atticus is referring to work that he did as a lawyer as "legal work." When Atticus says "paying me" he pronounces it "payin' me." Americans often talk this way in informal situations. However, when Atticus speaks in court, he pronounces the "ing" sound at the end of words clearly.

Now that we have studied the dialogue, I hope you will find it easier to understand. Let's conclude by listening to the entire dialogue one more time.

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