

# THE IDEAL LITTLE GIRL Pt. 1

In *To Kill a Mockingbird* Scout is constantly bedeviled by members of her family and the community for not being a proper little girl. Her chief tormenter is her Aunt Alexandra, who has argued heatedly with Atticus over Scout's dress as well as her tomboyish behavior. But she is also castigated by Mrs. Dubose and even by her brother, Jem, who at first scorns her for acting like a girl and later for not acting like a girl.

The two documents in this section suggest that there was, indeed, an ideal little girl, but that as often as not, it was an ideal that was rarely translated into reality.

The ideal little girl, not only in the 1930s South but in the 1950s South and other places when *To Kill a Mockingbird* came out, was an image of pure femininity. Great stress was placed on her training to be a lady—in the South, one might even say, her training to be a "belle." As the interview that opens this section suggests, such training meant careful attention to dress and language, as well as manners and play. The ideal little girl never wore jeans or slacks. She wore skirts and dresses, often with appropriate hat and gloves. Such attire seems foreign to our Scout. As recently as the late 1950s, little girls in boarding schools and somewhat older girls in colleges were subject to disciplinary action if they wore jeans outside their dormitories, except on picnics or outings for which they received special permission to vary their attire. This was true of many parts of the country, but especially in the South.

It was expected of little girls that they be soft-spoken, demure, and refined in their speech. No proper little girl would dream of using coarse language or improper grammar, as Scout often does. Older women gave private lessons in elocution—how to speak properly.

Femininity even guided the play of ideal little girls. Requirements in demure posture meant that she did not participate in rough physical play. Instead, hers was girl's play: she had baby dolls and bridal dolls; she played house; she had tea parties and dress-up parties. She learned to dance demurely in her white gloves and long dress, and to arrange flowers at the junior garden club.

