



The N-Word

Understanding
controversial
language in *To Kill a
Mockingbird* by
Harper Lee



FREWRITE

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper:

01

What is your initial reaction to this word?

02

When, if ever, should it be used?

03

Where do you hear this word in your world?

04

How do you feel about its usage in literature?

ETYMOLOGY

Part of Speech: Noun

Definition: A contemptuous term for a black or dark-skinned person.

Origin: Late 16th century. After Latin niger meaning 'black.'

Usage: The word nigger has been used as a strongly negative term of contempt for a black person since at least the 18th century.

Today it remains one of the most racially offensive words in the language. Also referred to as 'the n-word,' nigger is sometimes used by black people in reference to other black people in a neutral manner.

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/nigger>



“INCIDENT” BY COUNTÉE CULLEN



1. What might lead a child to insult another child in this way?



2. In what ways is the child’s prejudice more disturbing than an adult’s?



3. How does Cullen’s experience echo Gloria Naylor’s story from the essay I just read?



4. What is significant about the fact that two writers from two very different times faced the same ugliness?