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Event honors Lee's book

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Jim Noles said he was 11, maybe 12, when he read Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" for the first time.

"I think we were living in Yemen at the time, which may be about as far away from Alabama as you can get, and yet this book was about my home state," Noles said. "The book has some tragic things to say about Alabama in the 1930s in the Great Depression, and it's sad in that regard, but it's also so inspiring and affirming."

It's because of "To Kill a Mockingbird" that Noles said he became a lawyer, following in the steps of one of the books most memorable characters, Atticus Finch.

Noles, whose family lives in Florence, also is the co-chairman of the steering committee for the Alabama Humanities Foundation that's celebrating the book's 50th anniversary. As part of the celebration, the humanities foundation asked more than 30 artists to create pieces that are inspired by "To Kill a Mockingbird" and the story of Scout, Jem and Atticus Finch.

The art is on display at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and will be auctioned May 22 in Montgomery.

"When we asked the artists to participate, we found that no one turned us down," Noles said. "I'm not sure we would have gotten that from other books."

Locally, libraries are creating celebrations around "To Kill a Mockingbird."

Nancy Sanford, director of the Florence-Lauderdale Public Library, said there are several interactive events scheduled for the coming months, including an opportunity for community members to write down what the book has meant to them, as well as two screenings of the 1962 film based on the book.

"We want to give people a reason to re-read the book and talk about it and share their feelings," she said. "This is one of the most popular and memorable books to come out of our country, and it's from Alabama."



File/The Birmingham Pledge Foundation
Nelle Harper Lee

"It is the quintessential piece of Alabama literature."

One of the reasons "To Kill a Mockingbird," which won the Pulitzer Prize, is so popular is that it touches on some universal themes, said Katie Crawford, public relations and publications director for the humanities foundation.

"The story is connected with the innocence of childhood, and it also sheds light on pre-civil rights Alabama and dealing with some of those harsh issues," she said. "This is really an educational event because, when you re-read the book as an adult, you'll find something totally different in it than you did when you read it in high school. That's the power of this book."

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