

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Twelve Angry Men

by Reginald Rose

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About the Author

Reginald Rose (1920-2002) was born in Manhattan and attended both high school and college in the city. During WWII, he joined the Army.

Rose's writing career began in the age of live television drama, but he later developed scripts for movies and the theater. His first teleplay was performed on CBS television in 1950 and from his experience as a juror in a manslaughter trial, Rose gained the knowledge and ideas for *Twelve Angry Men*.

Reginald Rose won many national and international awards and continued writing for many years. His works are noted for their realistic commentaries on matters of social and political importance. One of his works, *Thunder on Sycamore Street*, for example, directed attention to the possible dangers of conformity.

Twelve Angry Men originally aired on CBS's Studio One in 1954, but this production was a shortened version of Rose's original work. This is the version that appeared in print in *Six Television Plays* and later in school anthologies.

The film version of this play starring Henry Fonda was produced in 1957. Its running time is 93 minutes. There is also a 1997 film version of *Twelve Angry Men* available on video with a racially mixed jury and with Jack Lemmon in Henry Fonda's role. Additionally, an alternative version of the play with a female cast exists called *Twelve Angry Women*. The dialogue is basically the same as the 1954 play. Although the original is a bit dated, it remains the superior version.

This play deals with the sensitive issues of prejudice and racism, relying heavily on the portrayal of stereotypes. The ultimate purpose of these portrayals is to delineate the value of justice and morality, looking past stereotypes and prejudice. Students must be alert to the fact that the views, improper as they are, did indeed influence jury decisions for many years. This controversy emphasizes the play's important theme of justice prevailing, even when only one person stands up for what is right.

All references come from The Dramatic Publishing Company edition of *Twelve Angry Men*, copyright 1983.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify and define these elements of drama: plot, character, dialogue, and staging.
2. state how the staging reveals the setting, and how staging contributes to the mood.
3. identify the protagonist and the main antagonist in the play and state the nature of their conflict.
4. distinguish between drama and melodrama and identify *Twelve Angry Men* as one or the other, supporting the choice with evidence from the play.
5. explain how playwright Reginald Rose differentiates between his characters.
6. define the term “stereotype” and explain how stereotypes are used in this play.
7. cite examples from the play to prove the point that all the details in a drama are important in:
 - A. providing character motivation/differentiation
 - B. advancing the action of the plot
 - C. revealing theme.
8. discuss the following themes in the play and indicate how they are revealed to the reader:
 - A. Justice and fairness will prevail if there is one just man who believes in them.
 - B. Intolerance and prejudice may be mundane in appearance, but are, nonetheless, persuasive.
 - C. For one person to stand alone against the group takes courage.
9. comment on the motivation of the three major characters and discuss whether this motivation is a convincing and believable explanation for their behavior.
10. identify the dramatic climax at the end of each act and state what produced it.
11. explain how he or she would have voted, citing evidence from the play.
12. define various terms relating to the legal system.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. How does melodrama differ from drama? Is this play more of a drama or melodrama? Explain.
2. At the end of the play, the audience cannot be completely sure that the boy was *not guilty*. Why do you think the boy's guilt or innocence was left uncertain? How would you have voted?
3. What is the mood of this play, and what elements of staging contribute to the mood? Explain.
4. Define the term "stereotype" and identify at least six stereotypes found in this play.
5. Write an essay in which you prove, by referring to incidents and comments in the play, that each of the following are themes in this play:
 - A. Justice and fairness may prevail, even if there is only one just person who believes in them.
 - B. Intolerance and prejudice may be mundane in appearance, but are nonetheless persuasive.
 - C. It takes courage for one man to stand alone against the group.
6. A good drama is supposed to make the reader think and respond. Did this play succeed in this? Why or why not?
7. What is reasonable doubt? How does it differ from being reasonably sure?
8. People are often judged mentally unstable or incompetent if they cannot reason. How does reason affect the thought process of the first juror to change his vote?
9. Our jury system requires the selection of twelve people to come to a conclusion about the guilt or innocence of a person on trial. What questions would you put to a potential juror to determine if he or she should serve on this particular jury?

Twelve Angry Men

Act I

VOCABULARY

unanimous – complete agreement with no one dissenting
refugee – a person who flees one country and seeks safety somewhere else
el – a train of the same design as a subway train that runs on tracks elevated a few stories above street level.
retire – to leave the open court to go to a private room
calculus – a complicated mathematical process
belligerently – in a hostile or angry manner
monopoly – the exclusive ownership of a business
switch knife – more commonly referred to as switchblade, one whose spring-loaded blade is concealed inside the body of the knife
proposition – a deal; bargain
bickering – arguing
mugging – a physical attack to take money or goods from another person
breeding ground – a place that feeds and nourishes the growth of what is born there
flimsy – weak and thin

- In your own words, state what instructions the judge gives to the jurors. How many jurors must vote guilty for the accused to be convicted?

- Before the jurors are locked in their room, what is the last thing they hear that might influence their thinking when deciding the defendant's guilt or innocence?

- Describe the staging for this play and indicate what mood the staging generates. (In addition to the set, mention something about the climate and temperature of the set.)

Act III

VOCABULARY

hung jury—a jury which cannot reach a unanimous verdict; even an eleven to one vote results in a hung jury

tenement—a large apartment building offering only the basics, usually located in an urban setting .

reflectively – with insight and deep thought

writhing – squirming, moving in twisting movements

conceivable – able to be pictured mentally and believed

intimidate – threaten, frighten into submission

1. In the opening of Act III, Juror Eleven praises the fact that people can hold unpopular opinions in this country. He continues speaking about democracy. Why does Reginald Rose give him these lines?

2. What does Three do to Eight in the beginning of Act III that causes the others to cry, "Look out!"

3. There is one note of comic relief in the third act. After the jurors vote, it is introduced that they are voting on whether or not they are a hung jury. What somewhat humorous ironic statement does Eleven make?

4. What did Juror Four do that keeps the group from being a hung jury?
