

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Twelve Angry Men

by Reginald Rose

Copyright © 2004 by Prestwick House, Inc., P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938.
1-800-932-4593. www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to copy this unit for
classroom use is extended to purchaser for his or her personal use. *This material,
in whole or part, may not be copied for resale.*

ISBN: 978-1-58049-841-8

Item No. 200824

Twelve Angry Men

Pre-Reading

1. At some point in their adult lives, most Americans will be called to report for jury duty. Do you think you would enjoy sitting on a jury, or would it feel like a chore? On what case would you most like to serve as a juror? Explain your answers in a paragraph or two.
2. Does trial by jury seem like a fair system to you? Imagine a local newspaper has asked citizens to send in their opinions on the matter. Write a letter to the editor in which you explain your feelings on trials by jury. Whatever opinion you hold, write a letter that will persuade those who currently disagree with it to change their minds.
3. The first draft of *Twelve Angry Men* was written for television in 1954. At that time, it was very likely that a jury would consist entirely of white males. Today, a more inclusive approach is taken when selecting juries. What, in your opinion, would a jury truly representative of the American people as a whole look like? Number a list from 1 to 11. Then list the members of your imaginary jury. Include their sexes, races, and ages (remember: jurors must be at least 18 years old). Finally, explain why you think your jury accurately represents the full spectrum of Americans.

Notes on Characters and Costumes

4. Read over the descriptions of the jurors and the foreman. Which one of them do most relate to? Explain your answer in a paragraph, emphasizing why your personalities would be compatible.
5. Of the foreman and the jurors, which one do you think you would instantly dislike? Explain your answer in a paragraph.

Act One

6. Imagine you're one of the jurors: you're faced with a grave decision, and you've just been locked in a small room that's oppressively hot, humid, and uncomfortable. You don't know how long this process is going to take, and you're surrounded by strangers. How do you feel? Elaborate in a descriptive paragraph, focusing on your five senses as well as your mental state.
7. The foreman speaks of a defendant who was "let off" by a jury because of reasonable doubt. As it turned out, the defendant was guilty—meaning that the jury had let a murderer go free. Because the defendant could not be tried again for this same crime, he was never brought to justice.

How would you feel if you had been one of the jurors on that trial? Imagine that you were, and you have just learned that you helped a criminal guilty of homicide get off unpunished. Write an e-mail to a friend describing how you feel. Would you take back your vote, if you could, or do you still stand by your decision? Give your reasons why.

8. How would you define "reasonable doubt"? Rather than using a dictionary, explain what the phrase means to you in a short paragraph. What kind of doubt would you consider "unreasonable"?
9. When the foreman calls for a show of hands, it turns out that eleven members of the jury are ready to announce that the defendant is guilty and call it a day. Only one juror isn't sure, making the tally eleven to one.

Think briefly about your own character and your usual responses to peer pressure or the pressure of your family. If you were Juror Eight, voting not guilty, would you give in to the overwhelming pressure and change your vote to convict the defendant? Explain your answer in a paragraph.

Twelve Angry Men

10. Juror Three suggests that you can tell by the look on a person's face what kind of character he or she has. Do you agree? Write a dialogue between yourself and Juror Three in which you address this idea.
11. Juror Eight says, "It's not so easy for me to raise my hand and send a boy off to die without talking about it first."

When *Twelve Angry Men* was written, we had not yet established a method of collecting DNA as evidence. Suppose that your state governor has proposed a law stating that no one will be given the death penalty in the absence of DNA-related evidence. Would you support such a law? Write a letter to the governor, sharing your views on the matter.

12. In speaking of the defendant, Juror Eight says, "He's a tough, angry kid. You know why slum kids get that way? Because we knock 'em over the head once a day, every day."

What do you think Juror Eight means by this statement? Make a list of ten ways in which you think the better-off "knock" the less fortunate "over the head" every day.

13. It quickly becomes clear that Juror Ten is a racist who is condemning the defendant for being "one of *them*." In America, one is entitled to a trial by a jury of one's "peers"—or equals. The catch is that some Americans do not feel that those of another race, class, gender, religion, or sexual orientation really *are* their equals.

Would trials be fairer if every member of the jury shared the same race, class, gender, religion, and sexual orientation as the defendant? Elaborate on your opinion in a paragraph or two.

Response Journal

14. Juror Three points out that the defendant was overheard saying “I’m gonna kill you” to the victim. However, “I’m going to kill you” is a phrase that many utter without meaning it literally. It indicates that someone is very angry with another person, but not necessarily plotting murder against them.

Make a list of at least five other phrases commonly uttered but rarely meant literally. (“I’m starving” is another example.) Why do you think these exaggerations exist in our language?

15. Without quite realizing it, Juror Three holds two conflicting opinions about his son. When his son was young and unwilling to fight with others, Three was “so ashamed.” Now that his son has grown into a violent young man, Three has decided that “tough kids” are detestable.

Which would bother you more as a parent: having a “tough kid,” or having a child who refuses to fight (or even runs away)? Explain your answer in a paragraph.

16. As Juror Three’s teenage son (who has not seen Three in three years), write a page-long journal entry about your relationship with your father. Feel free to be as inventive and creative as you like, but make sure to explain why you have chosen not to get in touch with Juror Three.
17. Juror Four says that “slums are breeding grounds for criminals.” If you believe this is true, explain why? If you disagree, why do you think many feel as Juror Four does?
18. In half a page or so, write what Juror Five might be thinking as Jurors Four and Ten make insensitive, degrading remarks about his background.
19. Jurors Four and Ten simply assume that none of the jury members were raised in slums. Describe a time when you or someone you know made an assumption about a person and, as a result, said something that hurt or deeply offended that person. How did the scene play out?

Twelve Angry Men

20. Choose any juror other than Juror Eight. In a paragraph, from the point of view of your juror, describe how “you” feel upon seeing Juror Eight’s recently-purchased knife.
21. It often seems that many of us are so stressed and tired that we can only do the bare minimum on jury duty. We show up, put in our time, and leave. This certainly seems to be true of many on this play’s jury.

Juror Eight, however, has done far more by using his personal time to track down a knife similar to the defendant’s. Describe a time when you put in extra work or went out of your way for something you believed in. What did you do? How was he experience valuable?

22. Before you begin Act Two, take a moment to decide which of the jurors has changed his verdict. Name your man and explain why you think he is most likely to have switched sides at this point in the play.