

Twelve Angry Men



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF REGINALD ROSE

Reginald Rose was born in 1920 in Manhattan and spent his youth, high school, college years, and adult life in New York City. He attended City College (now incorporated into the City University of New York). After college, he served in the US Army during World War II. He rose to the rank of first lieutenant, while serving from 1942 to 1946. Rose married Barbara Langbart in 1943. The couple had four children. Rose achieved literary success as an adult when he sold his first teleplay *Bus to Nowhere* to CBS in 1950. His 1954 teleplay *Twelve Angry Men* established his name in the literary world, and is his most famous work. He received an Emmy for the play, which was later adapted into an Oscar nominated feature-length film, as well as into the script for a live stage version. Rose's other works include: the television show *The Defenders* (1961), winner of two Emmy awards for dramatic screenwriting; the teleplay *The Incredible World of Horace Ford* (the basis for an 1963 episode of *The Twilight Zone*); the screenplay of *Crime In The Streets* (1956); and films with British producer Euan Lloyd, including *The Wild Geese*, *The Sea Wolves*, *Who Dares To Win*, and *Wild Geese II*. In 1963 he got remarried, to a woman named Ellen McLaughlin, with whom he had two children. He died in 2002 from heart failure.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Reginald Rose's play does not draw its concept from any known historical case. His work was probably influenced by popular genres and ideas of the time, including the predominant Film Noir genre that focused on crime and detective dramas and demonstrated a certain cynicism about human nature. Because Rose was originally writing for television, he would have been influenced by the historical event of increasing television popularity and access. The literary movement of Late Modernism was influenced by the suffering of World War II, and by changing conceptions of what art ought to strive to accomplish. Many artists were losing interest in producing "art for art's sake" (Modernism) and were becoming involved in political and social issues through the lens of art. As a veteran of the war, Rose would have had as much interest as anyone in responding to the war with his art. His script for *Twelve Angry Men* demonstrates the deep problems with human nature and society, and yet restores faith in the American legal system as an attempt at achieving justice.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Reginald Rose's late modernist work demonstrates many characteristics of this time period in literature. Modernism was shaped by the cultural shift of industrialization and the horrors of large-scale world wars. Artists in many different genres felt that the old rules and forms were no longer appropriate to express the rapidly changing modern world. Modernist works show innovations of form and content, and self-consciousness for the processes of art itself. Late modernist works show a shift to the post-modernist ideas of political and social critique that can be achieved in art. *Twelve Angry Men* demonstrates innovative and contemporary language in its dialogue paired with a concern for the internal lives of human beings and the impacts these internal lives have on society and culture. Contemporary late modernist works that share characteristics with *Twelve Angry Men* include: [Waiting for Godot](#) (1949) by playwright Samuel Beckett; a series of successful plays by poet T. S. Eliot including *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk*, (1953) and *The Elder Statesman* (1958); and *Briggflatts* (1966) by poet Basil Bunting. The screenplay and stage play of *Twelve Angry Men* show an interesting reaction to the influence of popular television and film on literature. In many ways, the play is best placed in conversation with other crime dramas. The movie version exhibits qualities of the Film Noir style popular in the 1940s and 1950s. Other Film Noir crime dramas that may have influenced *Twelve Angry Men* include: [The Big Sleep](#) (1946), *The Big Heat* (1953), *The Set-Up* (1949), *Night and the City* (1950), and *Gun Crazy* (1950).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Twelve Angry Men*
- **When Written:** 1954 (teleplay); 1955 (theatrical play)
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 1955
- **Literary Period:** Late Modernism
- **Genre:** Drama
- **Setting:** A jury room, the present
- **Climax:** Juror Eight persuades all the other jurors except Three to vote "not guilty." Three confronts Eight with a knife in a silent power play. The climax is resolved as Three surrenders and votes "not guilty."
- **Antagonist:** Prejudice and bias exhibited primarily in the characters Three and Ten

EXTRA CREDIT

Twelve Angry Jurors. Contemporary productions of Reginald Rose's play often change the title to "Twelve Angry Jurors" to

allow for gender-neutral casting. The original play does not address prejudices and biases related to sexism, but the play intentionally strives for timelessness by instructing that the jurors be dressed and cast to belong in “the present.”

Adaptations for the big screen. The teleplay was revised by Rose for a 1957 movie that received three Academy Award nominations. A 1997 movie version was also released, demonstrating the story’s timelessness.



PLOT SUMMARY

Twelve jurors retire to the jury room as a murder trial concludes. The charge is murder in the first degree, and the judge reminds the jurors that they must base their unanimous decision of “guilty” or “not guilty” on whether or not there is “reasonable doubt” in their minds as to the guilt of the accused. The accused is a youth from a poor urban area who is on trial for killing his father with a **switch knife**. The jurors converse as they settle into the jury room: Seven offers chewing gum and complains of the heat, Five is surprised that the Guard locks the door to the room, and Twelve worries about missing his job in advertising. The jurors discuss Four’s hand-tailored suit, and the Foreman offers a story about his uncle, a tailor, who once served on a murder trial where the accused was acquitted. Years later, the Foreman says, the man was discovered to be guilty, after all. Three complains that the six-day trial could have been finished in two days, and Seven agrees, stating that “that business about the knife” was the phoniest story he ever heard. The youth claimed he lost the switch knife, which he was known to have purchased, on the night of the crime.

The Foreman calls the group to order, and Seven hopes the proceedings will be quick, as he has tickets to a Broadway show that night. Ten says that it probably serves the dead father right for letting his kid run wild as all those “kind of people” do. The group decides to vote immediately to see where they stand. Seven hopes they might already be in accord. They vote by raising their hands. Everyone votes “guilty” except for juror Eight who votes “not guilty.” Three is surprised as this and says that one could tell the boy was a murderer just by looking at him. Eight asks him where one looks to see if a man is a killer. Eight says he voted “not guilty” because there were already eleven votes for “guilty” and it’s not so easy to send a man to his death without discussing the trial first. Eight points out that the boy had a terrible life growing up, and he feels the kid deserves their deliberation. Ten disagrees, saying the kid received a fair trial, and that the jurors don’t owe his kind of untrustworthy people anything. For the first time, Nine, an elderly man, speaks out in protest, saying that no group of people is more or less honest than any other. Eleven closes **the window**, but Seven wants it open. Eleven, an immigrant from Europe, is quickly bullied by Seven into reopening the window and finding a

different seat. Three and Four retrace the boy’s story. The old man who lived on the floor below heard the boy yell, “I’ll kill you,” and then heard a body fall to the floor. He hurried to his door and saw the boy running down the stairs. The boy claimed he was at the movies, but didn’t have a ticket stub and no one there remembered seeing him. The woman across the street saw the stabbing through the windows of a passing elevated train. Eight asks Ten why he believed the old man and the woman’s testimony when he’d already stated that all “those people” were dishonest.

Juror Three brings up his own son from whom he is estranged. He feels that all kids will break one’s heart through disobedience and selfishness. Four and Ten feel the kid’s background is against him, but Five points out that he himself grew up in a slum. He grows angry, feeling that these statements are personal attacks against him.

The jurors discuss the switch knife, the murder weapon, and ask to have it brought in because it is distinctive in appearance. Eight says he feels it is possible that someone else killed the father with a similar weapon to the one the boy purchased. As he claims this is possible, he reveals a second knife he has that is identical to the first. He purchased this knife in a shop near the crime scene. Eight proposes a vote by **secret ballot**. He says that he is willing to concede his doubt and vote “guilty” if all the other jurors feel that this is how the jury should vote. The other eleven jurors cast their votes. There are ten “guilty” votes and one for “not guilty.”

Three and Seven are furious that someone changed their vote, thereby prolonging the jurors’ deliberations, and demand to know who did it. They immediately accuse Five, but Eleven stands up for him, saying that he thought it was the purpose of the American system to protect those with “unpopular opinions.” Nine offers that he was the one to change his vote. He points to Eight’s courage in standing alone, in asking them to listen and deliberate further, as the reason for his changed ballot.

Two and Four, at the water cooler, wonder about the meaning of “beyond a reasonable doubt.” What evidence do they need to support a “not guilty” vote? Do they need evidence of the boy’s innocence? Three tries to start a game of tic-tac-toe to pass the time and Eight says that this is not a game, and reminds them all that a man’s life is at stake. Eight begins to explain his “feeling” that the testimonies of the old man and the woman don’t seem right. The jurors consider the length of time that it takes for an elevated train to pass and how deafeningly loud such trains are. Eight wonders how the old man could have heard the kid yell, “I’ll kill you!” over the sound of the train. Three wonders why the old man would lie and Nine points out the quietness and poverty of the man. He says the man might have needed attention so badly that he would “make himself believe” something he didn’t know for certain. Nine says that he speaks from experience.

Eight questions whether or not the kid would yell, “I’ll kill you!” out of anger or because he plans to literally kill his father. He points out that many of them have said such a thing, with no plans to do so. Five chooses to change his vote to “not guilty” because he thinks there’s a doubt. Five questions whether the old man could have “run” to the door, as he moved slowly in court and used canes. The jurors ask for the diagram of the apartment layout to determine how far the man’s room is from the door. The old man said it took him fifteen seconds to get to the door. Eight recreates the old man’s movements by pacing out a space in the jury room. Juror Two times Juror Eight as he pretends to get up from a bed and move through the space. It takes thirty-nine seconds. The jurors acknowledge that there is quite a discrepancy between this and the old man’s testimony. Three is furious and accuses Eight of acting out of sympathy for the kid. Eight says to Three that he wants the kid to die and that he is not considering the facts. Three lunges at Eight shouting, “Shut up! I’ll kill him!” as he is restrained by two others. Eight says to Three, “you don’t really mean you’ll kill me, do you?”

Four feels that the others are behaving like children and letting their emotions get the better of them. Eleven says that the beauty and power of the American legal system is that it attempts to achieve unbiased decision-making, and that the jurors should not make a legal decision into something personal. The jurors do another round of voting. They are evenly split: six for “guilty” and six for “not guilty.” The jurors wonder whether they should announce themselves as a hung jury so that the boy will be retried with a different set of jurors. But Eight feels that they’ll be able to reach an accord. The jurors vote on whether or not they are a hung jury, but this vote is also split evenly. Two explains that he changed his mind because Eight was calm and confident and Three was angry and insulting. Four points out that these considerations do not change the guilt of the accused.

Four begins to make a series of counter-arguments to Eight’s claims. He demonstrates, by the same timing method, that it would have taken the killer longer than fifteen seconds to run past the old man’s door. Perhaps the old man was wrong about how long it took him to get to the door, but right about what he saw? Two and Five change their votes back to guilty. Eleven points out how dark it was in the tenement building when the jurors went to visit the scene of the crime. He wonders how anyone running down the stairs could be identifiable. Eleven asks Seven if he really feels no doubt about the case, and then says he must not understand what “reasonable doubt” means. Seven is immediately upset that someone fleeing from another country could come to America and tell him about right and wrong and how things work. Four silences Seven by saying that no one is asking where anyone, or their fathers, came from.

Two raises something that has been bothering him about the case. The stab wound appears to have been made downward from above, as if the attacker was taller than the victim. But the

boy was not. Three demonstrates, by holding the knife and stabbing it toward Eight, how a downward wound could be created by a shorter person. Eight points out that the boy was an experienced knife-fighter, who was already in trouble for this activity. Five suddenly realizes that among the knife-fights he has seen in his life in a troubled neighborhood, switch knives are always handled underhanded. An experienced knife-fighter would not disobey this rule in a moment of peril and emotion.

Eight demonstrates that for the assumption of “guilty” to hold, one must suppose the kid was smart enough to avoid making an experienced knife wound, yet dumb enough to murder his father in front of a passing train of witnesses, smart enough to wipe his fingerprints from all the doors and the knife, yet dumb enough to not invent a decent alibi. The impossibility of these contradictions convinces everyone, except Three, Four, and Ten. Ten bursts out that such people are never innocent and that they don’t value human life. As he speaks, several of the other jurors rise and walk to the window, turning their backs on him. Four tells Ten to not speak again. Four says he still will vote “guilty” because of the testimony of the woman across the street. The jurors recount her testimony until they realize that she was wearing bifocals, and would have had to wake up in the middle of the night and look across a blurry area, through a passing train, to see the murder occur. All the jurors, save Three, vote “not guilty.” Three insists he won’t change his mind, and Nine points out that “it takes a great deal of courage to stand alone.” All jurors leave, except Three and Eight. Three picks up the switch knife from the table and points it at Eight. Eight says, “not guilty.” Three turns the knife and presents the handle to Eight. “Not guilty,” he says.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Foreman – The leader of the jurors who facilitates the process of voting and discussion. The Foreman believes in the guilt of accused for a majority of the play. He is not particularly intelligent or actively involved in the debate, but he is focused and does not change his opinion lightly. He enjoys his own authority.

Three – A strong-minded, loud-mouthed, prejudiced man. Three is the final holdout in claiming the accused is guilty at the end of the play. His strong belief in the guilt of the youth seems to stem from his personal situation, his prejudices, and the painful rift between himself and his son (which causes him to judge all youth negatively).

Four – A self-confident man who is clearly used to being listened to, Four is identified by marks of wealth and intelligence. Although he is a strong supporter of the guilt of the accused until nearly the end of the play, he is more rational and levelheaded than most of the other jurors. He is the only

one to present successful counter-arguments to the persuasive observations of Eight.

Five – A young man whose youth shows in his timid nature. He quickly desires to vote not guilty, but only has the courage to do so when following Eight and Nine’s lead. He cowers under Three’s anger at him. Five grew up very poor, and he is sympathetic with the low economic background of the accused.

Seven – A ridiculous man whose “guilty” vote seems to rest more on indifference than prejudice. Seven is the juror who continuously expresses a desire to wrap up the process quickly and leave. He is loud and extravagant, and he clearly is not invested in the judicial process or his judicial responsibility. He prefers to get distracted by such things as bullying Eleven for opening **the window**.

Eight – The central character in the play, Eight is the only juror to initially vote “not guilty.” This vote, which prevents an immediate unanimous guilty decision, and his insistence that the jurors commit time and effort to deciding the fate of the accused, power the events of the play. Through his calm and clever discussion of the case, all the other jurors are eventually convinced of the same reasonable doubt of the accused’s guilt. He is also a charismatic speaker. He appears to have had some plan to defend the accused in the jury room as he brings a matching **switch knife** as his own evidence. Eight’s self-confidence in standing alone and his sympathy for the accused present a direct contrast to Three’s pigheadedness and prejudice.

Nine – An elderly, good-natured man, Nine is compassionate and thoughtful, unlike many of the other jurors. He is the first to change his “guilty” vote to “not guilty” during the **secret ballot** vote. He does so primarily because he respects Eight’s courage in standing alone and wants to have the chance to see the case fully discussed.

Ten – The most prejudiced and cruel character in the play, Ten is driven by a deep-seated “us versus them” complex concerning rich and poor. He speaks of the accused and people like him, from poor backgrounds, as “them.” He believes that none of “them” are trustworthy or good people. His bitterness and anger toward “them” spills over repeatedly in the play. At the end of the play, the other jurors move toward **the window** to express their disagreement with his cruelty by refusing to listen to him.

Eleven – An immigrant from somewhere in Europe, Eleven exhibits an awareness of, and awe for, the idealistic principles behind the American legal system. He changes his “guilty” vote quickly, after defending the right of any man to have an unpopular opinion in America following the **secret ballot** vote. Initially, he seems reluctant to distinguish himself from the others, perhaps fearing the very attacks that follow. He experiences the cruel treatment of some of the other jurors early in the play when he attempts to close **the window**.

Twelve – A man who is defined by his job in advertising, Twelve is shallow and a snob. He maintains his vote of “guilty” more out of the comfort of maintaining his opinion than any other reason, it seems. He believes the jurors should acknowledge that they’re a hung jury and should let the case go to another trial.

Accused kid – Although the accused youth never appears as a character on stage, discussion of his actions and motivations drives the play. The youth is referred to as a “kid” by many of the jurors. He grew up in a slum without a mother, and is an immigrant—all facts that color the jurors’ ideas about him and his guilt. He is accused of stabbing his father to death.

The old man downstairs – A weak elderly man who offers a significant piece of testimony in court. The man walks with two canes. Juror Nine proposes that the old man testifies because he needs to be seen and heard, having been overlooked and lonely for too long. The jurors ultimately come to believe that the old man’s testimony of hearing the kid shout, “I’ll kill you!” and then seeing the kid fleeing down the stairs is questionable because of how long it would have taken him to move to the door of his apartment, plus the deafening sounds of a passing train.

The woman across the street – A neighbor of the accused kid, this woman testifies in court that she saw the murder occur through the windows of the passing train. Her testimony is brought up as suspect by some jurors late in the play because she wears glasses and might have been confused about what and whom she saw.

Judge – A minor character whose offstage voice sets the context for the play by reminding the jurors of their legal responsibilities in this case. The judge establishes the charge as “murder in the first degree” and explains that for a man to be “guilty” the evidence must prove this “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

MINOR CHARACTERS

Two – An indecisive man whose opinion is easily swayed by Eight and by Four. He changes his guilty vote to not guilty based on the calm and persuasive conduct of Eight and the angry conduct of Three.

Six – An average man who is honest, yet unremarkable. He changes his vote from guilty to not guilty, but he does not exhibit the prejudices, flair, or loud-opinions of the other jurors. One of the quietest of the jurors.

Murdered father – The crime at the heart of the play is the accused kid’s stabbing of his father. Little is known about the father, other than that he and the kid didn’t get along.

Guard – A minor character who assists at the door of the Jury Room by procuring the requested items of evidence for the jurors’ examination.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



REFLECTION OF AMERICAN SOCIETY

The process of a trial by a jury of one's peers is often considered to be both a reflection and core practice of American democratic society. This play runs with that idea, using the jury itself—as a group and as individuals—to reflect both the things that may unite Americans and their differences in background, prejudices, daily concerns, and ideals. The characters are a cross-section of professions, classes, ages, and immigrant status, whose differences inform how they work with each other and their gut reactions to the murder case at issue. As the trial continues, Juror Eight feels sympathy—maybe too much—for the boy on trial because the slums are a tough place to grow up, while Juror Five relates to the boy because he has a boy like him, and Juror Eleven relates the boy's experiences to what it was like for him growing up in Europe. Meanwhile, Juror Ten holds a virulent prejudice against people like “them” who grew up poor and as a minority (this last is only implied). Significantly, it is the “outsiders”—Juror Eleven, who is an immigrant, and Juror Nine, who is an elderly man—who most believe in the American justice system and want to ensure a fair trial.

When all the jurors' ideals and backgrounds come in close contact in the closed jury room, social differences become personal arguments and attacks. Slowly, though, as the jurors are forced to sift through the evidence after Juror Eight alone votes “not guilty” in the initial vote, they become more willing to hear each other out and look past appearances. Now the men are trying to work together within the American jury system, with the notable exception of the extremely stubborn Juror Three. Though portraying, literally, just a jury hashing out a case, the play could also be said to show the men hashing out their identities as Americans with ambivalent feelings about the jury process, and by extension, their roles as American citizens.

It is notable that the play is *not* trying to portray American society at one particular time, such as when it was first staged in 1964. It also leaves the particular identities of the characters ambiguous, encouraging the audience to think beyond their preconceptions or knowledge of particular races and cultures. Instead, the stage directions and setup encourage a sense of timelessness and universal applicability: the setting of the play is described simply as “the present”, and the characters are not given names or characteristics that would date them. Instead of

detailed descriptions of, say, ethnicity or class, the characters are given general descriptions, each more like a character type, some based on social status and others simply on personality. For example, Juror Four “seems to be a man of wealth and position” and Juror Five is “naïve.” In this way, the play attempts to portray what it sees as the *universal* conflicts and currents that drive American society, and the way those conflicts and currents can, at times, produce an American society that is both messy (after all, the definite guilt or innocence of the accused is never established) but also founded on common ideals of justice, freedom, and citizens' responsibility.



JUSTICE

As a play portraying the deliberations of a jury in a murder trial, *Twelve Angry Men* is naturally concerned with the idea of justice. Yet the play does not represent either the American criminal justice system or the abstract concept of justice as simple or clear. A simple representation of the criminal justice system might be named *Twelve Serious Men*, and portray those men as diligently, rationally, and single-mindedly going through the evidence until they uncover the facts that reveal what actually happened between the son and his father on the night of the murder. *Twelve Angry Men* is not that play. Instead, from its opening moments, it shows how both the juror's motivations and their conceptions of justice are influenced, not entirely rationally or even consciously, by their personalities and experiences. The men are anything but dispassionate when the deliberation process reveals their irrationalities and biases and makes them confront them.

To start with, each juror has a different take on his civic duty: some cherish it in the abstract as an American ideal, some are attached to it because of their personal experience of injustice, and many just want to come to a verdict so that they can get home fast. Juror Eight's insistence on the jury's right and duty to investigate the evidence might seem at first like a rational, principled insistence on justice and due process, yet it is founded on his gut sympathy for the teenage defendant. Had he not felt such sympathy, he might not have held out, which shows that people can be prejudiced in their insistence on *lack* of prejudice too. Other jurors, in contrast, initially vote guilty based on their personal experiences or prejudices, such as Juror Three's estrangement from his own son. Some jurors just want to avoid this whole annoying process. As one juror puts it before the first vote: “who knows, maybe we can all go home”.

After Juror Eight forces the jury to look through the evidence, even jurors who wanted to finish the case right away soon get caught up in the process. And as they weigh the “objective” evidence, and argue back and forth—with their personal ideas, values, and prejudices all on display in their arguments, even as they are now intent on doing their civic duty—juror after juror changes their vote from guilty to not guilty, until the case is

decided. Yet, though they have now carried out the jury deliberation thoroughly and with the great responsibility the Judge impressed on them, and a “not guilty” verdict has been reached, the play’s conception of justice remains complicated. While the jury has voted not guilty, they have done so not on the basis of having definitely proved the defendant’s innocence, but rather because the case against the boy was not beyond a reasonable doubt. Thus, the play portrays absolute justice as something that is beyond the reach of any jury. All that can be achieved is the justice of “reasonable doubt” defined by the legal system, a definition of justice that is both less satisfying and more realistic. This definition of justice allows for, and makes compromises because of, the types of fallibility and irrationality that were evident in both the jurors and the witnesses in the trial. Since many jurors were, in the end, trying their hardest to figure out what happened, the play also confronts us with the possibility that there is no room for an absolute idea of objective truth in any concept of justice where humans are involved.



CERTAINTY AND DOUBT

The jury of *Twelve Angry Men* begins its deliberations with a vote of 11-1 in favor of guilty and ends 12-0 in favor of not guilty. From this, we might conclude that the jury started with false certainty and deliberated until they uncovered the certain truth. However, the jury is never able to establish whether or not the defendant is innocent. Rather than uncovering certainty, their deliberations uncover doubt—enough doubt that they do not feel that the evidence is enough to convict the defendant “beyond a reasonable doubt.” In fact, the play and the jury deliberations might be described as not just the jury’s journey from certainty to doubt in terms of the case, but also of the jury’s shift from looking at the world with certainty – certainty about what is true and certainty about the correctness of one’s own views – to taking a more skeptical view, a more doubtful view, of facts presented as truth and of the rightness of one’s own perspective.

Only Juror Eight has any doubt about the boy’s guilt after the first vote. The rest think much like Juror Twelve: “After six days, he doesn’t know. In six days I could learn calculus. This is A, B, C.” These jurors want certainty, because doubt is uncomfortable and scary, and might make them miss Christmas dinner. Doubt doesn’t get you answers or closure. As one jury member puts it to Juror Eight: “Suppose you talk us outta this and the kid really did knife his father?” Yet, as the jurors delve into their deliberations, evidence that seemed solid comes into question, and we hear less about how the jurors want to go home quickly.

Once they are all taking the evidence seriously, prompted by Juror Eight, the jurors have to start to worry about the unreliability of the witnesses, like the old man and the woman

across the tracks. For Juror Three, who is certain of the defendant’s guilt, the eyewitnesses are infallible, even after doubt is raised over whether the old man downstairs or the woman across the El tracks could possibly have seen and heard what they said they did. For jurors like Juror Five, though, the old man’s testimony leaves them in a muddle—while Juror Five is not convinced that the old man lied, he has to acknowledge that there is doubt about whether the old man heard and saw what he said he did, and Juror Five is the third one to change his vote. Although the slow movement of jurors to the side of “not guilty” may seem like steady progress towards greater certainty in light of consideration of the evidence, the jurors who change their minds do not express certainty in their new vote either.

Interestingly, as the jurors begin to face and admit to the many reasonable doubts about the case, their attitudes towards each other changes as well. At first, the jurors make blanket moral judgments about each other and whole groups of people. Their certainty about the truth of their own perspectives makes them hard and unkind to each other. Yet as they admit to doubts about the case, it seems almost as if those doubts cause them to soften their stances, to admit that their initial perceptions might have been wrong about more than just the case. The principles each juror felt certain about going into the case are shaken not only by the arguing and the evidence, but because the jurors are forced to face the doubts that they have hidden behind their own biases, prejudices, and irrationalities. As the jurors come to be more comfortable in admitting doubt, they cease to treat other quite as much like categories or types and treat each other, instead, as individual people.



STUBBORNNESS AND TAKING A STAND

The conflict of the play is set in motion by Juror Eight’s lone “not guilty” vote at the start. He is stubborn in refusing to give the easy guilty verdict that a surface glance at the evidence, or conformity to the group’s sentiment, might suggest. By the end, the situation is neatly reversed: Juror Three remains steadfast as the lone “guilty” vote. Yet the play treats these two different solitary stands very differently. Though some might accuse Juror Eight of excessive sympathy, his stubborn insistence that the jury go through the evidence in detail is admired (albeit grudgingly) by other jury members, and forces the jury to treat the trial and its evidence with respect. In contrast, the play unequivocally encourages us to condemn Juror Three’s pigheadedness. Through this mirroring of stubbornness – the first applauded, the second not – the play explores when sticking to your guns is imperative, when it is right but not useful, and when it actively harms both something like a jury process and, more generally, the pursuit of a just outcome.

Juror Eight refuses to vote guilty until the jury looks over and thinks about the evidence. He stands for the jury taking its

responsibility seriously and ensuring that there is no reasonable doubt before convicting. After presenting a bit of evidence that he feels begins to establish the reason for his doubts about the case, he even promises to give up and vote guilty along with the rest of the jury if they all continue to think that the defendant is guilty. Juror Eight, it could be said, stands for his convictions about the need to give the defendant a fair shot. His stubbornness forces the jury to look past self-interest in a quick resolution and use reasoning instead of stereotypes. In contrast, Juror Three makes his stand after the jurors have gone over the evidence and raised multiple doubts about its veracity, enough doubt that the other jurors have all changed their positions to not guilty. Juror Three, then, stands for his prejudices, for refusing to see doubts that have been raised. The play, then, suggests two things: first, that being stubborn or taking a stand can be either heroic or cowardly, moral or immoral, depending on what the stand is for. And second, through the jurors that switch sides, the play shows that just as there can be heroism in stubbornness, there can also be heroism in allowing yourself to change your mind for good reasons.



PREJUDICE VS. SYMPATHIES

The play shows a variety of types of prejudice and the ways that it can affect those who hold those prejudices. At the same time, it also shows how the juror's sympathies – usually considered a positive trait – can impact a person's rationality or sense of justice. Most obviously, the play shows how the prejudices of the jurors affect their actions in the jury room. Racial or cultural prejudice plays a significant role in the deliberations, as many of the jurors, in particular Juror Ten, uses the term “them” to refer to the defendant and the community to which he belongs. (The actual race of the defendant is never mentioned, making the point that there are many racial prejudices at constant play in the world and the United States). Juror Three, meanwhile, is prejudiced against the young male defendant, it is suggested, because he is estranged from his own son and therefore has a negative view of all young men. Juror Eight, in contrast, sympathizes with the young man's poor upbringing, and his initial vote of not guilty is based more on this sympathy than on a deep-seated principle about justice.

While showing the prejudices of many in American society towards “outsider” groups, the play also shows how the jurors are prejudiced against each other within the jury room itself. They judge each other based on how they look, what they say, how much money they have or make, or even based on the prejudices they reveal during deliberations. This prejudice is immediately noticeable when Juror Three says of Juror Four, “Ask him to hire you. He's rich. Look at that suit!” in the opening conversation. As the jurors sift through the evidence more deeply, some retain their prejudices and stand firm in their first

impressions. However, as they get to know each other and realize the ways in which the evidence may not add up, it is also notable how they are forced – at least within that jury room – to temporarily see past their prejudices. As this happens, the play shows how prejudice can make a person blind to the full complexity of the world, while also suggesting that it need not be this way.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE WINDOW

The jury room where the entire action of the play occurs has a single window. The jurors disagree on whether or not this window should be open or closed. This disagreement foreshadows and symbolizes the deep divides between the jurors that will prevent them from agreeing throughout most of the play. The jurors see each other initially as members of different groups based on socio-economic factors, employment, country of origin, and, presumably, race. These divisions are accompanied by complex prejudices that prevent the jurors from adequately judging the accused and from fairly judging each other. Many of the jurors are not afraid to express both their prejudices and their preferences, and this contrariness is demonstrated in the strong-minded opinions about the window. The play deals with the nuances of standing one's ground for a good cause versus being stubborn for the sake of stubbornness. The window allows a certain type of stubbornness to be demonstrated early on. However, late in the play, the window is linked to a more meaningful version of standing one's ground, as the jurors move to look out the window during Ten's prejudiced rant. The act of moving to the window is equated with an active refusal to listen to and participate in Ten's prejudice. The window is therefore linked to a silent, yet powerful, opinionated act of standing one's ground.



SWITCH KNIFE

The murder weapon which features at the heart of the legal case takes on symbolic meaning when Eight brings a matching weapon into the jury room to prove his point about reasonable doubt. When Eight sticks a matching knife in the wall, the murder weapon represents the certainty of the jurors that is quickly draining away. Initially, eleven out of twelve jurors felt convinced of the accused's guilt. However, various aspects of the case, a few of these involving the switch knife, are called into question. Not only is the switch knife not as unique as the jurors assumed it to be, the stab wound, created by a man unfamiliar with handling a switch knife, raises

questions. The knife, as a switchblade, is also linked to the poor community and impoverished circumstances in which the accused grew up. Five, who grew up in a similar environment, is able to identify the proper use of a switchblade, which links usage of these knives to the difficult circumstances of impoverished neighborhoods. The knife introduces doubt as well as sympathy for the accused. The switch knife is also used symbolically at the very end of the play during the final confrontation between Eight and Three. In the last moments of the play, Three seems to consider killing Eight before handing the knife to him, handle first. This act symbolizes a transfer of power, an active decision on Three's part to relinquish his aggression and stubbornness. After handing off the knife, Three declares the accused "not guilty."



SECRET BALLOT

This play deals with the idealistic principles behind the American legal system and the ways in which real people must struggle to meet these principles and interpret them in their own ways. The legal system attempts to achieve a fair trial through the use of unbiased citizens on a jury. Most of the jurors are far from unbiased, though, and they struggle against a variety of prejudices while attempting to interpret the language of "reasonable doubt." Clearly, the ideal of the American legal system is difficult to achieve in reality. But many of the characters, particularly those who have suffered from prejudice, such as Eleven and Five, feel the pull of these standards of justice. The vote by secret ballot that Eight proposes symbolizes an ideal principle of justice that is unbiased. The initial vote by hand, and the following discussion among the jurors, shows that many are swayed by the opinions of others, by the pressures of conformity, and by other concerns. A secret ballot vote is the best attempt at unbiased, idealized justice. Eight, a rational and sympathetic man, proposes this approach to gain a true assessment of the jurors' opinions.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the The Dramatic Publishing Company edition of *Twelve Angry Men* published in 1983.

Act 1 Quotes

☞☞ Murder in the first degree—premeditated homicide—is the most serious charge tried in our criminal courts. You've heard a long and complex case, gentlemen, and it is now your duty to sit down to try and separate the facts from the fancy. One man is dead. The life of another is at stake. If there is a reasonable doubt in your minds as to the guilt of the accused . . . then you must declare him not guilty. If, however, there is no reasonable doubt, then he must be found guilty. Whichever way you decide, the verdict must be unanimous. I urge you to deliberate honestly and thoughtfully. You are faced with a grave responsibility. Thank you, gentlemen.

Related Characters: Judge (speaker), Accused kid, Murdered father

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

The play opens with the judge in a criminal court case summarizing for both audience and jury what is at stake in this case. His words spell out the basic principles of the American legal system: a jury must declare the accused guilty if, and only if, his or her guilt has been proved beyond a reasonable doubt. This passage has the dual effect of setting the scene and introducing a few of the most contentious topics of the play. Broadly, the judge places the play in conversation with the American legal system. The setting of the play is timeless, but the twelve jurors represent a diverse body of Americans intended to present a variety of types of opinions from a variety of types of people, with a variety of types of prejudices and personalities--all in connection to the timeless legal and social issues addressed in the play.

The topic of this play is justice, but also the way the very human jury thinks about and perceives justice. The judge establishes the jurors' responsibility to be a "grave" one and asks that they "deliberate honestly and thoughtfully." The next several lines of the play show a different reality, as the men complain about the court proceedings and rush the deliberation process. Furthermore, the idea of "reasonable doubt" is highlighted immediately in this opening passage. Reasonable doubt, what it is and what constitutes reasonable doubt in this specific case, will be under debate throughout the play--particularly when reasonable doubt is in the hands of *unreasonable* humans.

☛ Ten: It's tough to figure, isn't it? A kid kills his father. Bing! Just like that. Well, it's the element. They let the kids run wild. Maybe it serves 'em right.

Related Characters: Ten (speaker), Four, Accused kid, Murdered father

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Early dialogue in the play helps to establish the diverse characters of the twelve jurors. These men differ in age, occupation, experience, background, religion, and (presumably) race. These differences result in a variety of types of prejudices and sympathies, and the play often reveals why certain characters think in certain ways and make certain assumptions. In this passage, juror Ten is already establishing his character and prejudices. Throughout the play, he shows a dislike of the group of people to whom the defendant belongs. It seems that the kid accused of killing his father is poor and grew up in an impoverished neighborhood. His race is never specified, but because Ten groups the accused with people different than himself (a group he belittles and stereotypes, assuming everyone from that group to be the same), it may be that the accused kid belongs to a minority racial group as well (but this all depends on individual staging of the play, of course). Ten's vitriolic remarks escalate over the course of the play and eventually alienate other jurors who are shocked at the amount of unfounded hatred he displays. In this early scene, however, Ten's remarks against a whole group of people go relatively unnoticed by the other jurors. All the jurors exhibit forms of prejudice. Although the word "prejudice" normally has a negative connotation, this play presents a connected idea of "sympathy." Juror Eight is inclined to like and feel sorry for the accused kid because of his impoverished background, while Ten is inclined to dislike him. Both are forms of bias, and though sympathy is a more virtuous kind of bias in the world outside the courtroom, for a jury, all bias, whether positive or not, is supposed to be removed.

☛ Three: I never saw a guiltier man in my life... You sat right in court and heard the same thing I did. The man's a dangerous killer. You could see it.

...

Eight: He's nineteen years old.

Related Characters: Three, Eight (speaker), Accused kid

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Unlike Ten's collective prejudice, Three displays a more specific and personal dislike of the accused kid. Eventually it becomes clear that Three has bad memories of his son and holds onto the accused kid's guilt to an irrational degree because of this strained relationship. Three is the least rational of the jurors. He is stubborn and he does not waffle like some of the others, but he bases his opinion on impressions and feelings, rather than facts. Here, he exhibits this tendency when he says "you could see" that the accused kid is a dangerous killer, simply by looking at him. Three's certainty of the kid's guilt is founded on shaky ground. At the same time, Eight's doubt is also emotionally-based, as his reply demonstrates. Where Three sees a killer, Eight sees a kid. Eight is inclined to give a kid the benefit of the doubt because of his age.

From the beginning to the end of the play, Eight and Three reverse roles. At the beginning, Eight stands alone for "not guilty," and at the end, Three stands alone for "guilty." This parallel between the characters shows their similarities and differences. They both base their initial opinions of the kid on their prejudices, but they behave very differently when "taking a stand." Three continues his stubborn conviction based on his feelings, whereas Eight, despite his own sentiments, turns to logic and reasoning to address others. He does not fold under the pressure Three (and the others) put on him for standing alone.

☛ Eight: There were eleven votes for guilty. It's not so easy for me to raise my hand and send a boy off to die without talking about it first.

Related Characters: Eight (speaker), Accused kid

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis



The jurors begin their deliberations by taking a vote to see where they stand. In this vote, eleven men vote "guilty" and one votes "not-guilty." Eight's logic, as he states it initially, points out the rashness of the proceedings. These men are ready to let a kid accused of murder suffer the greatest punishment possible without thorough deliberation.

Although it becomes clear that Eight has thought rationally about the details of the case, his initial "not-guilty" vote is based on a simple ideal of the American legal system. A twelve person jury is intended to be diverse, so that a case can be thoroughly discussed, prejudices countered, and a better decision reached than any one man might make alone. This requires discussion and debate.

Despite its initial appearance of uniformity, this jury is actually quite diverse (as much as possible in a group of only men), with a variety of conflicting opinions that come to light when they take the time to discuss them. The legal system is designed to move the reality of humanity (which is messy with prejudices, boredom, and emotions) to a more perfect state in which justice can be served. Getting twelve men to agree is more likely to achieve justice than following the will of any one man. This is not always the case, but Eight reminds the others of the ideal of justice that they should strive toward. He takes a stand in this scene by casting the one dissenting vote. This action is heroic because he is upholding the higher values of justice rather than serving his own interests.

☞☞ Eight: I don't want to change your mind.... I want to talk for a while. Look – this boy's been kicked around all his life. You know – living in a slum – his mother dead since he was nine. That's not a very good head start. He's a tough, angry kid. You know why slum kids get that way? Because we knock 'em on the head once a day, every day. I think maybe we owe him a few words. That's all.

Related Characters: Eight (speaker), Accused kid

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 15-16

Explanation and Analysis

Eight's initial explanation of why he wants to discuss the accused kid's case does not include an analysis of evidence

or the mention of reasonable doubt. This is a notable nuance of the play: Eight is not free from prejudice, despite his critical heroic role in this play. Eight is presented as a hero who persuades the other jurors to change their minds and spare a youth through his thoughtful arguments for reasonable doubt.

This passage shows, however, that emotion, not logic, motivates him. Despite his honorable behavior in granting the defendant's case thorough discussion rather than a rash decision, Eight is just as predisposed to think in certain ways and make certain assumptions as the other jurors. He is sympathetic toward the defendant, and this is partially because of his own feeling of guilt. He sees himself and his group as repeatedly and unfairly mistreating the members of the defendant's group. Eight is biased in favor of the accused kid because he sees his toughness and anger as the result of this mistreatment.

Eight believes in giving each person consideration of his circumstances when considering his crime. He points out the hardships in the kid's life, including the death of his mother. From a legal standpoint, the death of his mother should have no bearing on the kid's guilt. The crime, and not his life, is what is under consideration. But humans are not fully rational beings, and Eight exhibits the power of sympathy to sway opinions.

☞☞ Ten: I don't mind telling you this, mister. We don't owe the kid a thing. He got a fair trial, didn't he? You know what that trial cost? He's lucky he got it. Look, we're all grownups here. You're not going to tell us that we're supposed to believe him, knowing what he is. I've lived among 'em all my life. You can't believe a word they say. You know that.

Related Characters: Ten (speaker), Eight, Accused kid

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis



Ten presents a counter-point to Eight's sympathy for the accused kid. Just as Eight is more inclined to give time, consideration, and understanding to the kid because of his circumstances, Ten is less inclined to give these things. He sees the kid as representative of a group that he dislikes and distrusts. His prejudice against "them" leads him to conclude that "you can't believe a word they say." Who the "they" are exactly is unclear, but the ambiguity contributes

to the timelessness and universality of the play. If this play was staged in a certain city at a certain time period, the audience might automatically assume the kid belongs to a group they know to be poor and unprivileged. In a different city, at a different time period, the audience might instinctively assign the kid to a different group. There have always been groups that are judged and discriminated against by the majority and the kid could belong to any of these.

Interestingly, Ten says that he lived among this group all his life, yet he doesn't identify as one of them. Does Ten's personal exposure to this group lead to his particular vitriol against them? Or is this an exaggeration to explain why he feels justified making such claims? Perhaps suffering at the hands of specific people in Ten's life have made him the way that he is. Whatever the reason for his prejudice, it is clear that Ten's understanding of justice for the kid is different than Eight's.

☞ Nine: (*to Ten very slowly*). I don't know that. What a terrible thing for a man to believe! Since when is dishonesty a group characteristic? You have no monopoly on the truth.

Related Characters: Nine (speaker), Ten

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis


Ten's prejudiced statements against the group that the accused kid belongs to turn Nine against him. Nine sees Ten's statements as illogical because they assume that generalizations about groups of people are true. He questions Ten: "since when is dishonesty a group characteristic?" This remark points out the flaws in all prejudices rather than providing commentary on this specific example. The accused kid might be honest or dishonest. The audience never discovers this one way or the other in the course of the play. However, Nine makes the argument that to assume dishonesty of an individual because he is part of a certain group is flawed logic. Even if a stereotype exists for a reason, it is unfair to apply this stereotype to everyone in the group. There will always be many exceptions to the rule.

Nine shows Ten that prejudices are flawed because they assume more certainty than one should rationally claim. Ten assumes that the kid is dishonest and, therefore, guilty. Nine

says this is a horrible thing to believe because it leads to certainty without any foundation. Ten makes an assumption without evidence in a specific case. Yet, he is very certain about his assumption. Nine, on the other hand, feels it is worthwhile to always consider the exceptions to the rule and to avoid broad assumptions. He lives his life with more doubt and more questions because he does not make assumptions about groups of people as a whole. He looks (or tries to look) at people as individuals.

☞ Three: You're right. It's the kids. The way they are—you know? They don't listen. I've got a kid. When he was eight years old, he ran away from a fight. I saw him. I was so ashamed. I told him right out, "I'm gonna make a man out of you or I'm gonna bust you up into little pieces trying." When he was fifteen he hit me in the face. He's big, you know. I haven't seen him in three years. Rotten kid! You work your heart out....

Related Characters: Three (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Three's statements about the accused kid are interrupted by a story he shares about his relationship with his own son. Although this seems off-topic, the connection between these things in Three's mind is clear. Talking about the accused kid misbehaving and not listening makes him thinking of his own kid misbehaving and not listening. He makes it clear that he assumes all kids have these problems when he says, "It's the kids. The way they are--you know? They don't listen." He expands his own experience with a kid into a generalization about all kids. Like Ten's prejudice against the kid's group, Three's prejudice against kids in general leads him to be overly confident in his accusation. He feels certain of the kid's guilt without a logical basis for his certainty.

Three's stubbornness is more understandable with his personal context. Even though Three is cruel, abrasive, and stubborn, his story makes it clear that he is in pain and that the source of his actions is personal suffering, which he is reminded of because of this case. Three was cruel to his son--threatening him for running from a fight--but his bitterness is stated in the stage directions and his unhappiness is palpable as he says "I haven't seen him in three years." On one level, he might feel his kid is really "rotten," but on another level, he feels pain (and possibly

guilt) over their estrangement.

☛ Five: I've lived in a slum all my life.

Ten: Oh, now wait a second!



Five: I used to play in a back yard that was filled with garbage. Maybe it still smells on me.

Foreman: Now let's be reasonable. There's nothing personal.

[Five stands up.]

Five: There is something personal!

Related Characters: Ten, Five, Foreman (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Juror Five, who is more youthful than the other jurors and who comes from a poor background, takes objection to Ten's ongoing prejudice against the group of people that includes the kid. This prejudice seems to be based on the group's low socio-economic class, which Ten sees as contributing to their violence toward others and their deceptive natures. Five realizes that Ten could be speaking about him, indirectly, because his background makes him a member of this group. Ten immediately backtracks and the Foreman tries to soothe the situation, but the Foreman's comment points out the problem with Ten's prejudice. The Foreman tries to soothe Five by saying that there is nothing personal in Ten's comments, meaning he is not directly attacking Five. But Five sees how his prejudice, although spoken generically about a group of people, directly impacts individual people, of which he could be considered one.

This diversity within the jury shows the jury to be a "slice" of American life. Ten is pitted against the accused, but Five is sympathetic toward him because he sees the similarities in their lives. The jurors represent a variety of different viewpoints because of their different backgrounds. Because of this diversity, the jury, as a whole, is able to consider the accused kid and the evidence from a variety of different angles of prejudice and sympathy that, ideally, balance each other out in their decision-making process.

☛ Four: Take a look at that knife. It's a very strange knife. I've never seen one like it before in my life and neither had the storekeeper who sold it to him.

[Eight reaches casually into his pocket and withdraws an object. No one notices this. He stands up quietly.]

Four: Aren't you trying to make us accept a pretty incredible coincidence?


Eight: I'm not trying to make anyone accept it. I'm just saying it's possible.

Three: (shouting). And I'm saying it's not possible.

[Eight swiftly flicks open the blade of a switch knife and jams it into the table next to the first one. They are exactly alike. There are several gasps and everyone stares at the knife. There is a long silence.]

Related Characters: Four, Eight, Three (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 23-24

Explanation and Analysis

Four offers the most rational arguments for the accused kid's guilt. He is reasonable and calm in his delivery and seems more interested in the logical steps of the case than Three or Ten, who have personal and impassioned reasons for blaming and accusing the kid. Therefore, Four's shift from certainty to doubt seems to be the most accurate measure in the play of the success of Eight's arguments for reasonable doubt.

One of Four's reasons for certainty, as detailed in this passage, is the unusual appearance of the knife used to kill the father. It seems highly unlikely that another identical knife could have been purchased and used in the murder of the father. Four refers to this possibility--that the kid bought an identical knife to the one someone else used to kill his father--as a "pretty incredible coincidence." This helps clarify the term "reasonable doubt." Yes, Four says, there's a possibility that someone else bought the exact same knife, but this is not a "reasonable" possibility. It is, in fact, a highly unlikely possibility. When Eight produces an identical knife and jams it into the table, however, the gesture is strong visual proof that this possibility is more reasonable than it might have seemed. He was able to easily

procure an identical knife, which means that any other person might have been able to as well. This causes the jurors to doubt their original certainty that the knife the kid bought is the same one that killed his father.

●● Seven: Now wait a second. What are you, the guy's lawyer? Listen, there are still eleven of us who think he's guilty. You're alone. What do you think you're gonna accomplish? If you want to be stubborn and hang this jury, he'll be tried again and found guilty, sure as he's born.

Eight: You're probably right.

Seven: So what are you gonna do about it? We can be here all night.

Nine: It's only one night. A man may die.

Related Characters: Eight, Seven, Nine (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis



Seven is one of the least engaged jurors; he seems to prioritize concluding the case and leaving, with little respect for the seriousness of the situation, as this passage shows. Despite his motives for rushing the decision, Seven makes a legitimate point about Eight taking a stand against the rest of the jurors. In choosing to stand alone, Eight is preventing a decision that is held by the majority, and that would be reinforced by another group of people if Eight's stubbornness resulted in a hung jury. Eight acknowledges the truth of these words. This shows the tension between stubbornness and taking a stand in the play. When is it good to stand up for what you believe and when is it appropriate to acknowledge that your thinking could be at fault? The play seems to answer that both are important. Three, at the end of the play, must yield to the majority. Eight, at the beginning, takes a stand for a good cause.


Nine highlights Seven's frivolity in the face of what is at stake in these deliberations: a man's life. Seven's impatience with Eight is partly justified because there are times when one should be able to admit they could be wrong in the face of an overwhelming majority who disagrees. But Seven's impatience is not justified in terms of the ideal proceedings of justice. The legal system is designed to serve justice after thorough consideration and deliberation, and Seven is

unwilling to sacrifice his time, even when another man's life is at stake.

●● Eight: I've got a proposition to make. I want to call for a vote. I want eleven men to vote by secret ballot. I'll abstain. If there are still eleven votes for guilty, I won't stand alone. We'll take in a guilty verdict right now.

Related Characters: Eight (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis



Eight responds to Seven's concerns that he is holding out stubbornly against a majority that disagrees with him by proposing a vote by secret ballot. This gesture shows that Eight is trying to balance stubbornness and taking a stand. If everyone else strongly feels it is time to make a decision for "guilty," he won't prevent this. He is willing to surrender gracefully, unlike Three at the end of the play. This move is risky in terms of Eight's agenda, which is to consider the reasons for reasonable doubt that he has sensed exist in the case. The other men might very easily have stuck with their first decision and proclaimed the accused kid "guilty." In fact, we see that only one man changes his mind even after this next vote.

Eight's call for the vote by secret ballot is a key moment in the play. When voting by secret ballot, the men are free to make their decision in isolation, without the influence and pressure of others. Certain jurors have already made it clear that they strongly dislike the accused kid or that they're impatient to go home. Eight has already taken abuse and frustration directed at him for delaying the proceedings. It would be difficult to stand up for what's right in this type of environment, in the face of this pressure from other men. Therefore, by voting by secret ballot, the men reach a more "pure" form of justice, "pure" because their decision is based on rational thought without peer pressure.

Act 2 Quotes

●● Eleven: Please. I would like to say something here. I have always thought that a man was entitled to have unpopular opinions in this country. This is the reason I came here. I wanted to have the right to disagree. In my own country, I am ashamed to say that.

Related Characters: Eleven (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 28



Explanation and Analysis

The vote of a single "not guilty," even though Eight has abstained, causes a strong backlash. Some jurors angrily express a desire to know who changed his vote. Eleven points out the problem with this: each person should be entitled to vote as he wills, even if that vote is unpopular. This is another ideal tenant of justice which is, clearly, not always perfectly fulfilled in practice. Eleven cites the founding American principle of free speech. The protection of free speech is all the more necessary and valuable when the speech being protected is unpopular.

Eleven is an immigrant, which is another example of the jury's diversity and another source of tension among the jurors who don't all accept Eleven in a way that's free from prejudice. As an immigrant, he has a unique understanding of American society and the American legal system. Unlike the other jurors, who might take their free speech and their right to dissent for granted, Eleven sees this as a strong point of American justice. In his home country, he didn't have the right to disagree, and freedom of speech is one important reason he came to America. Although this is an American ideal, it is easily forgotten in daily life. Eleven's "outsider" perspective remembers and prioritizes this ideal, while the other jurors are caught up in their emotional reactions to the proceedings in the jury room.

●● Nine: [*Pointing at Eight*] This gentleman chose to stand alone against us. That's his right. It takes a great deal of courage to stand alone even if you believe in something very strongly. He left the verdict up to us. He gambled for support, and I gave it to him. I want to hear more. The vote is ten to two.

Related Characters: Nine (speaker), Eight

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 28-29


Explanation and Analysis

In the face of ongoing pressure to reveal who changed their vote to "not guilty," Nine reveals that it was he who changed his mind. It seems that he speaks up in order to protect Five, whom Three assumes is the "culprit." In this passage, Nine explains why he changed his vote. His explanation tackles the difference between stubbornness and taking a stand. He admires Eight for exercising his right to disagree because to do so takes courage, a value not included in simple stubbornness, which is generally just selfish. Nine is curious about what else Eight will say because of Eight's willingness to take a risk and to "gamble for support."

Interestingly, Nine's change of heart isn't based on logic or on information about the actual case. It is based solely on the force of Eight's character and his persuasive request for support. While Nine is the oldest juror, and inclined to measured thinking and speaking, this passage shows that he "thinks with his heart," like many of the other jurors. He is persuaded not by reason, but by emotion. This is a reflection of human character more broadly, and it demonstrates the power of Eight's dissension and persuasive speech, as more and more jurors join the "not guilty" side.

●● Eight: An el train takes ten seconds to pass a given point, or two seconds per car. That el had been going by the old man's window for at least six seconds and maybe more, *before the body fell*, according to the woman. The old man would have had to hear the boy say, "I'm going to kill you," while the front of the el was roaring past his nose. It's not possible that he could have heard it.

Related Characters: Eight (speaker), The old man downstairs, The woman across the street

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

This passage details one of Eight's arguments that introduces doubt into the case. The old man, one of the witnesses, heard the accused kid yell, "I'm going to kill you," and this piece of evidence helped solidify both the identity of the killer and the boy's intentions. However, the other main witness described these events through the window of

a train roaring past the apartment building. How could the old man have heard the boy yell over the sound of the train? How can both these testimonies be true? By finding an inconsistency between the two testimonies, Eight calls both into question. Someone must have made a mistake or be lying, and this discredits the full testimony of the witness. It is unclear which witness is at fault, and so the jurors begin to doubt everything they accepted as fact from both witnesses.



Over the course of this play, there is a gradual shift from certainty to doubt among the jurors. Certainty leads to a verdict of "guilty." They are never sure of the accused kid's innocence, and yet they begin to realize that his guilt is not certain. This doubt leads to a verdict of "not guilty." The terms "guilty" and "not guilty" reflect the relationship between certainty and doubt in a legal case. The terms are not "guilty" and "innocent"--instead, reasonable doubt is enough for a "not guilty" verdict. This shift from certainty to doubt occurs when the jurors begin to doubt the eyewitnesses' accounts of what happened.

☞☞ Nine: It's just that I looked at him for a very long time. The seam of his jacket was split under the arm. Did you notice that? He was a very old man with a torn jacket, and he carried two canes. I think I know him better than anyone here. This is a quiet, frightened, insignificant man who has been nothing all his life, who has never had recognition—his name in the newspapers. Nobody knows him after seventy-five years. That's a very sad thing. A man like this needs to be recognized. To be questioned, and listened to, and quoted just once. This is very important.

Twelve: And you're trying to tell us he lied about a thing like this just so that he could be important?

Nine: No. He wouldn't really lie. But perhaps he'd make himself believe that he heard those words and recognized the boy's face.

Related Characters: Nine (speaker), The old man downstairs

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 33-34

Explanation and Analysis



Nine feels that he understands the character of the old man who testified because he can relate most to him, as an old

and (presumably) overlooked man himself. He points out details about the old man that he paid attention to and that might have seemed insignificant to the other jurors. He explains that the old man's ragged coat and his insecurities make him someone who is eager and grateful for the attention of the court. The psychological impact of this, to someone who is in desperate need of attention, will be to prolong that interaction. Twelve misunderstands this, as is clear when he asks whether Nine means that the old man lied in his testimony. Lying implies that the old man knowingly deceived the court and the jurors. Nine is speaking of something more subtle: the old man's slight exaggeration of his own certainty. He might have come to believe that he definitely saw the accused kid in the stairwell when in fact he wasn't certain at first.

This passage provides another angle on the relationship between doubt and certainty. Doubt and certainty are not only the products of reason, but of emotion and memory. Even an eyewitness can be unsure of what he or she saw. Emotional pressure can impact one's certainty. It is easy, with time, to become more or less certain of what happened before one's eyes. Eye witnesses can be very unreliable for this reason. The doubt or certainty of the jurors is based on evidence which is already shifting between doubt and certainty.

☞☞ Three: (*angrily*). He's an old man. You saw him. Half the time he was confused. How could he be positive about anything? [*Looks around sheepishly, unable to cover up his blunder.*]

Related Characters: Three (speaker), The old man downstairs

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

The old man's testimony has seemingly been undermined by Nine's comments that the old man might have had a reason to exaggerate, to claim he was more certain than he was about what happened. But one of the details that he was most confident of was how long it took him to get to the door. And yet this time seems impossible to the jurors. Does this undermine the old man's testimony? He must have been lying or misremembering when stating the amount of time it took him to get to the door, and, therefore, he could be lying about or misremembering other details. This shred of doubt

makes the jurors less certain about all of the old man's testimony.

Three, in this passage, is quick to say that the details of the testimony shouldn't matter. Of course, he says, the old man got the time wrong. He's a confused old man. As he speaks these words, however, he realizes that they undermine his agenda by negating all of the old man's testimony. An error in the testimony shouldn't be explained away by stating that an old man was bound to make mistakes, so this one should be overlooked. This implies that anything else in the testimony could also be a mistake. The use of the word "positive" in Three's statement incorporates the idea of "certainty." It seems the old man couldn't be certain, which calls his testimony into reasonable doubt--the exact thing Three is stubbornly trying to avoid.

☝ Eight: You want to see this boy die because you personally want it—not because of the facts.

Three: Shut up!

[He lunges at Eight, but is caught by two of the jurors and held. He struggles as Eight watches calmly.]

Three: Let me go. I'll kill him. I'll kill him!

Eight: You don't really mean you'll kill me, do you?

Related Characters: Eight, Three (speaker), Accused kid

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Eight argues that the kid's overhead yell of "I'll kill you" should not be treated as evidence of intention. Many people would say such a thing in an impassioned moment and not follow through with it, or even actually mean it. This is a (relatively) common phrase expressing anger, and should not be treated as a statement of intent or premeditation. Minutes later, the tension between Eight and Three rises to a fevered pitch, as Eight accuses Three of arguing for the accused kid to die because he "personally wants it." This conclusion shows the difference between ideal justice and reality. Eight is pointing out that Three is motivated by personal judgements. He is not operating as an unbiased judge of the situation.

This accusation angers Three, who is always quick to

respond emotionally. His anger seems to derive from the fact that Eight would make such a bold and offensive claim implying that Three wants someone to die. Three's anger and following comments hurt his reputation far more than Eight's accusation, however, because he seems to confirm his own hotheadedness, while also proving Eight's point from earlier. He yells that he'll kill Eight, because he's angry that Eight would accuse him of wanting someone dead, which is a very ironic twist. Eight's reply points almost too neatly to their earlier conversation. Does Three really mean this, or is he speaking in the heat of passion? And if he doesn't really mean it, why couldn't the same have been true of the accused kid's circumstances?

Act 3 Quotes

☝ Eleven: We have a responsibility. This is a remarkable thing about democracy. That we are...ummmm... what is the word...Ah, notified! That we are notified by mail to come down to this place and decide on the guilt or innocence of a man we have not known before. We have nothing to gain or lose by our verdict. This is one of the reasons why we are strong. We should not make it a personal thing.

Related Characters: Eleven (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 44-45

Explanation and Analysis

Juror Eleven, the immigrant, continues to hold onto and remind others of the ideals of justice and the way the American legal system has been designed to uphold these ideals. One aspect of this design that is effective, Eleven feels, is that the jurors have never met the accused before and so have no reason to be swayed in one way or another. He says that they have "nothing to gain or lose," and that this lack of bias makes them strong. This is, of course, an idealization of the process of trial-by-jury that has already been undercut by the actions of the play itself. Eleven believes that the jury should be impartial, and yet it is clear that the jury members have a variety of prejudices reflective of the diverse perspectives of American society. Eleven thinks that only knowing the accused would lead them to be impartial when, in fact, the jurors' own personal experiences have biased them before they ever saw the accused kid or heard about the case.

The final line of this passage shows that Eleven is aware of his statements about justice as an ideal. He says that the

jurors "should not make it a personal thing." He has earlier highlighted their responsibility as selected jurors to fulfill their duty well. The word "should" in his statement shows that he sees this as an ideal that the jurors are striving toward, not reaching. They "should" be acting without bias, but they're not.

●● Eleven: I beg your pardon, but maybe you don't understand the term, "reasonable doubt."



Seven: [*angrily*] What do you mean, I don't understand it? Who do you think you are to talk to me like that? [*To all*] How do you like this guy? He comes over here running for his life, and before he can even take a big breath he's telling us how to run the show. The arrogance of him!

Four: No one here is asking where anyone came from.

Seven: I was born right here.

Four: Or where your father came from. [*Looks at Seven, who looks away.*]

Related Characters: Four, Seven, Eleven (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 53-54

Explanation and Analysis

Seven takes personal offense when Eleven says that he does not understand the term "reasonable doubt." Seven's reaction shows that he is offended specifically because Eleven criticized him. Because Eleven is an immigrant, Seven implies that he has no right to tell him what to do or how to do it. He sees Eleven's attempt to correct him as arrogance, stating that because Eleven is an immigrant he is less entitled to speak about the American legal system. Four points out the unfairness of this attack because it is based on personal history. He says that no one should be asking about anyone's family's background. Seven feels he is different from Eleven because he was born in the United States, but Four's response "or where your father came from" implies that Seven is a first generation American.

Four's argument shows that Seven and Eleven have more in common than Seven might like to admit. America is a diverse nation of immigrants and using this as a basis for discrimination strikes Four as inaccurate and pointless, because it is something that many people have in common. He points out the illogical nature of Seven's prejudice against an immigrant when this is part of his background as well. Everyone is quick to think and speak from his own point of view, but this play repeatedly analyzes the

problems with this. One problem is that you might have more in common than you suspect with someone whom you are prejudiced against.


●● Five: ...Anyone who's ever used a switch knife would never have stabbed downward. You don't handle a switch knife that way. You use it underhanded. [*Illustrates.*]

Eight: Then he couldn't have made the kind of wound that killed his father.

Five: I suppose it's conceivable that he could have made the wound, but it's not likely, not if he had any experience with switch knives, and we know that the kid had a lot of experience with switch knives.

Related Characters: Five, Eight (speaker), Accused kid, Murdered father

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis


Five's experience living in an impoverished community where violence among his neighbors was commonplace turns out to provide key information in the case. Because he has seen switch knives used before, Five is able to demonstrate that they are used underhand rather than overhand. Three tried to demonstrate that the shorter son made a wound on his taller father by stabbing downward with an overhand stroke. Five says that the accused kid could have handled the knife in this way, and could have made the stab wound, but it seems unlikely that he would have done it in this way, given his previous experience with handling such a knife.

This discrepancy between the way the wound was made and the way an experienced knife handler would have made the wound introduces reasonable doubt of the assumption that the kid stabbed his father. Why would he have done something out of character and incommensurate with his experience? This seems unlikely. The language Five uses highlights the ideas of certainty and doubt. Eight says that the accused kid couldn't have made this wound. Five corrects him, saying, "it's conceivable that he could have made the wound, but it's not likely." Reasonable doubt does not require that the jury be *sure* the kid didn't make the wound. But it does require that they have good reason to suspect he might not have made it. This is what Five

provides with his analysis of how the switch knife is held.

☞ Ten: ...You know, they get drunk, and bang, someone's lying in the gutter. Nobody's blaming them. That's how they are. You know what I mean? Violent!...Most of them, it's like they have no feelings...They're no good. There's not one of 'em who's any good. We better watch out. Take it from me.

Related Characters: Ten (speaker), Accused kid, Murdered father

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

Ten's vitriolic hatred of the group to which the accused kid belongs finally spills over into a cruel tirade in which it seems inconceivable to him that the other jurors are changing their minds and pardoning the kid. As Ten speaks, the jurors begin to leave the table and stand at the window. This is a silent protest against the blatant prejudice and hatred in Ten's words, as if the jurors are refusing to listen to and condone what he says. Ten seems to burn himself out with this speech and to realize that the other jurors do not agree with him, as he silently joins the majority for "not guilty" after this final tirade fails. Perhaps he realizes that he has gone too far and exposed a level of hatred that is shocking even to others who have their own sets of prejudices.

Ten is unable to see even the slightest hope of redemption for the group to which the accused kid belongs. He says "there's not one of 'em who's any good." Herefers to them as "violent" and sees this violence as part of their natures: "that's how they are." He sees a lifestyle (or race) as the source of this violence, a lifestyle of drinking and violence that perpetuates more drinking and violence. The shocking part of this speech is Ten's lack of sympathy for people stuck in a community plagued by violence. Instead, he cautions his fellow jurors to "watch out" for these types.

☞ Three: ...You made all the arguments. You can't turn now. A guilty man's going to be walking the streets. A murderer! He's got to die! Stay with me!...

Four: I'm sorry. I'm convinced. I don't think I'm wrong often, but I guess I was this once. There is a reasonable doubt in my mind.

Related Characters: Three, Four (speaker), Accused kid

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

Juror Four maintains his rational thinking throughout the play. He switches sides with grace once he feels that "there is a reasonable doubt in my mind." In his measured thinking and unbiased rationality, Four embodies a sort of "ideal juror." He holds onto the ideal of the justice system--that reasonable doubt results in a "not guilty" verdict--and he isn't swayed by passion or stubbornness, but by measured persuasion. He exhibits strength in this passage by publicly admitting he was wrong. This shows the contrast between him and Three, who stubbornly sticks to his viewpoint. Four demonstrates that stubbornness is not the same thing as taking a righteous stand, and that gracefully yielding is more valuable than being stubborn in the face of reason.

Three is stubborn, but he is also certain of the kid's guilt, as if blind to the rational arguments made by others. He is horrified by the thought of a murderer walking the streets free. He feels certain that the kid must die to pay for his crime. Three sees Four's rational arguments against the kid (and his initial "guilty" vote) as evidence that Four was on his side, rather than as examples of Four's rational thinking. It is difficult for Three to imagine being convinced by evidence when, throughout the play, it is clear that he makes his judgements through gut instinct, as he did when he stated that anyone "could see" that the kid was a murderer, just by looking at him.

☞ Eight: [to Three] They're waiting. [Three sees that he is alone. He moves to table and pulls switch knife out of table and walks over to Eight with it. Three is holding knife in approved knife-fighter fashion. Three looks long and hard at juror Eight and weaves a bit from side to side as he holds knife with point of it in direction of Eight's belly. Eight speaks quietly, firmly.] Not guilty. [Three turns knife around and Eight takes it by handle. Eight closes knife and puts it away.]

Three: Not guilty!

Related Characters: Three, Eight (speaker), Accused kid

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

This poignant final confrontation between Three and Eight ends the play with all the jurors unanimously agreeing that the accused kid is "not guilty." This scene moves the struggle from one of logic, prejudice, and words to a struggle that is nonverbal and even potentially violent. Throughout this play, the jurors have used their words to persuade each other. In some cases, this has meant using logic and precision, and in other cases this has meant using personal experience, passion, or emotion. Justice has been sought despite the flaws of prejudice and hatred, despite the biases of the diverse jury. But in this scene it seems that the struggle has shifted from a struggle between "guilty" and "not guilty" to a personal struggle between Three and Eight. Eight says "not guilty" and Three repeats the words after

him, surrendering the knife in the same moment. This action symbolizes Three's surrender. Eight's way of persuading Three in this passage is mostly nonverbal. He seems more powerful than Three because he does not seem afraid, even though Three is threatening him with a knife. Three, on the other hand, notes that "he is alone" and seems cowed by this. Three does not take a stand, as Eight did, but surrenders when he is the only juror on one side of the equation. Even though Eight has achieved a great feat by convincing eleven jurors to switch to his side, the strength of Eight's character calls the process of justice into question. Eight is smart, persuasive, courageous, and powerful (more powerful than Three in this passage), and it seems these things, more so than the truth of the kid's situation, have resulted in the conclusion of this play and the justice that is served.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

The Judge gives the jury instructions from offstage, setting the scene as the lights come up. He (or she) lays out the stakes: a man has died and the defendant's life is in their hands. He informs the jurors that they must find the defendant not guilty if there is a reasonable doubt that he is guilty. The vote must be unanimous. He ends by impressing the weight of their "grave" responsibility on them: they must deliberate "honestly and thoughtfully."

The Judge's overheard speech sets the scene and immediately establishes the key questions at the heart of the play: what is reasonable doubt and can a group of men deliberate on a criminal case honestly and without prejudice? Throughout the play, the jurors' personalities stand in contrast to the ideal vision of justice proposed by the Judge.



Lights come up on the jury room. The room contains twelve "uncomfortable-looking" straight chairs, a clock, a water cooler, a garbage can, a single **window** and door, and nothing else. The Guard opens the window, surveys the room, and moves upstage to count the jurors as they enter.

The stark setting of the jury room shows that the jurors' minds should be focused on their task. However, the window, the water cooler, and the opportunity to play tic-tac-toe later distract the jurors.



As the jurors enter, some go to the water cooler, Juror Five lights a pipe, and Juror Seven opens the **window** a bit wider, while still others stand and lean on their chairs.

These mundane activities establish the jurors first and foremost as human beings, capable of flaws and prejudices.



Juror Seven nervously offers gum to the men at the water cooler and makes idle chat. Juror Nine responds to Juror Seven with a polite no. Juror Twelve complains about the heat in the room, saying that his taxes are so high they ought to cover air conditioning. Juror Seven commiserates, but adds that he's not too concerned because he thinks the deliberation will go quickly. Juror Nine sits down, agreeing that it's hot. The Guard locks the door behind him as he leaves, with all the jurors settled in their seats.

The jurors' personalities are established through these early interactions. Twelve is self-focused and used to privilege. Seven is flighty, and only vaguely interested in the proceedings, which he hopes will end quickly. Nine is aloof, but polite. The Guard reminds the jurors and the audience of the presence of a world and legal structure beyond the jury room.



Juror Three bristles at the need for the door to be locked. He adds that he is, however, fine with the defendant—"that kid"—being locked up forever. Juror Five comments that he didn't know that jury room doors are locked, and he'd never thought about it before, while Juror Ten responds that it's obvious the doors would be locked.

The locked door shows the seriousness of the proceedings, as well as creates a space in which twelve very different men are forced to confront each other's prejudices. Three shows his bias by belittling the accused as "that kid" and Five shows his nervousness.



Juror Four, acting as a peacemaker, asks everyone to openly admit that the heat in the room has them short-tempered. Juror Three, acting the contrarian, responds that he feels fine. Juror Twelve impatiently muses about his advertising job, saying that it's a quickly changing business and that he might return to find his company gone if they don't hurry up the deliberations. The Foreman suggests in response that serving on a jury is their duty, while Juror Three jokes that Juror Four should give Juror Twelve a job, noting that Juror Four is probably rich because of his custom-tailored suit.

The Foreman then comments that he had a friend who wanted to be on the jury instead of him. Juror Seven wonders why he didn't take the friend up on this. The Foreman continues that his friend served on a jury where they found the defendant not guilty, but later learned that he really did the murder. Juror Four notes that the double jeopardy law would prevent that man from being retried for the same crime. In the conversation that follows, Juror Seven comments on what he sees as the simplicity of this case and the unlikelihood of the jury not coming to an obvious decision, while Juror Three agrees about the case's simplicity, suggesting that the trial could have lasted just two days rather than six, but shrugs it off because the "system" is that everyone gets a fair trial.

As the jurors keep talking, Juror Seven and Juror Ten agree that the boy's story about losing his switchblade knife is ridiculous. Juror Ten explains away the cruelty of the murder by saying, "look at the kind of people they are." The Foreman gets the two of them to stop chatting and take their seats.

Juror Seven, meanwhile, expresses his impatience to get to a current Broadway show that night. The Foreman also corrals Juror Eight, who is standing at the window not paying attention, to sit down. Juror Ten comments that the kid killed his father easily because "they" let their kids do whatever, but Juror Four cautions him not to let emotion, like a prejudice against a group, get in the way of his thinking. Juror Three is focused on getting the case over. The Foreman announces that he will leave it to the others to decide how to proceed, and the men all agree to take a vote to see where they stand before deliberating. Seven hopes that they will already be in agreement.

Throughout, Four is rational and levelheaded. On the subject of the overly hot room he urges mature behavior, while Three shows a childish inclination to disagree for the sake of disagreement. Twelve's mind remains outside the situation in the jury room. References to Twelve's job and to the quality of Four's suit introduce the topic of class. Ideas about income and the difficulties of living in poverty appear throughout the play, affecting the jury members views in general and of the case.



The Foreman's story shows his predisposition to vote "guilty." He is more concerned with letting a guilty man go, than with wrongly accusing the innocent. The discussion of double jeopardy (the inability to try someone for a crime for a second time, once acquitted) reminds both jurors and audience of what is at stake in the jurors' decision: a man's life or the opportunity to let a murderer kill again. Seven and Three reveal their certainty about the case, and it does not appear that the evidence presented or the arguments made in court were well balanced between prosecution and defense.



The switch knife, which the kid purchased and claimed to have lost, appears in the story as one of the most important pieces of evidence. Yet Ten focuses not on this evidence, but on the character of impoverished people.



The jurors' characters are further defined: Seven is preoccupied by entertainment; Eight listens silently, his physical isolation at the window foreshadowing his disagreement with the other jurors; Ten continues to show that he thinks of the kid as a member of a group that is different and ought to be looked down on. Four confirms his awareness of prejudice. The preliminary vote shows that many of the jurors at this point are not interested in deliberating at length.



The vote is 11-1 in favor of guilty: Juror Eight is the only dissenter. Juror Three rises to confront Juror Eight, while Juror Twelve insists that the defendant's guilt is as "simple as A, B, C." Juror Three angrily comments: "I never saw a guiltier man in my life." To which Juror Eight pushes him on what a killer looks like, and gives the boy's age, 19, as a reason that he might be innocent. Juror Four tries to make peace between Juror Eight and Juror Three with the observation that they should not use emotional arguments.

Juror Three threatens to go through all the ways the prosecution "proved" the boy's guilt. Juror Ten brings up the "stupid story" about losing his switchblade again, all while Juror Four tries to keep peace. Juror Eight states that he's not sure whether he believes the kid's story, and that he voted not guilty because he found it "not so easy" to be the vote sealing the boy's fate of death. The other jurors protest that the vote was not "easy" for them, even though Juror Eight did not suggest it was. Juror Seven is defensive about how fast he voted.

Juror Eight replies that he wants to be heard out. He explains that "slum kids" get tough and angry because "we" – meaning society – are always knocking them down. He wants the kid to get a fair hearing in this jury room, for once in his life. The other jurors look at Juror Eight coldly. Juror Four refuses to buy the sob story—he remembers how life was hard for him too, but he put himself through college and didn't go to the extreme of killing. Juror Eleven can relate to the accused kid's hardships because he grew up in Europe in a country where "kicking was a science."

Juror Ten believes the kid got more than he deserves, a fair trial at the taxpayer's expense. He adds that he lives among "them", and is convinced that none of "them" can be trusted. Juror Nine calls out Juror Ten on his prejudice and says Ten doesn't have a "monopoly on the truth". Nine continues over Juror Three's objection, getting worked up until Juror Eight calms him. Juror Four insists that they can and must keep the talk civil, "behave like gentlemen," and stick to the facts. Juror Twelve says okay, "if you insist," and the Foreman quickly goes along with Juror Four.

Just then, Juror Eleven gets up to close the **window**, which starts an argument between him and Juror Seven. Juror Four proposes the compromise of trading chairs. The Foreman redirects everyone back to the case.

The reaction of the other jurors, particularly Three and Twelve, to Eight's vote shows that their votes are emotional, not rational, judgments. Four, on the other hand, reacts negatively to these displays of emotion. Throughout the play, Four is a character convinced of the kid's guilt, but rational and calm. This is important, as it shows that prejudice alone does not guide all the other juror's votes of "guilty."



Ten joins Three in emotional arguments in favor of "guilty," while Eight's explanation of his "not guilty" vote reveals sympathy of all human beings. He didn't vote "not guilty" because he felt confident in this decision, but because of respect for all human life. The other jurors are offended when they think he is criticizing them for quickly, and therefore callously, sending the kid to his death – though of course their taking offense signals that it is likely true.



Eight reveals his sympathy for slum kids, which is a different type of bias. Unlike Ten, who sees all poor people as inherently untrustworthy, Eight sees all poor people as deserving of sympathy because they've suffered at the hands of society. Four thinks each person is responsible for his actions regardless of his situation, but Eleven understands the negative impacts of mistreatment.



Ten, the opposite of Eight, feels the kid has already received too much sympathy in the form of a trial. He sees the trial as a benefit he's received from society. Nine reacts emotionally to the idea that only some people get to define what truth is, or who can be trusted. Later, Nine will further discuss the concepts of truths and lies. Four, again, maintains the peace.



The window is an innocent object over which the jurors clash. This shows how the strong personalities in room struggle to agree, even on a subject that isn't fraught with emotion.



Juror Twelve proposes that the jury go around the table and each try to convince Juror Eight “that we’re right and he’s wrong.” The Foreman and Juror Four immediately agree that this proposal is fair and Juror Two timidly starts with “it’s obvious” that the boy is guilty. When Juror Eight presses him, he changes this to “nobody proved otherwise.” Juror Eight reminds him that the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution allows the accused to be “innocent until proven guilty.” Juror Two, quite flustered, can only retort with “well, anyway...I think he’s guilty!”

Juror Three steps in to summarize what he calls the “facts”, and then reiterates the witness account told by the old man who lives below the room where the murder happened. Juror Eight responds that he doesn’t buy the old man’s story. Juror Four brings up the boy’s alibi of being at the movies at the time of the murder, and Juror Three quickly jumps in to agree. Juror Five questions why the boy didn’t have a ticket stub for the movies, but Juror Eight says no-one would hold on to a ticket stub.

Juror Ten, speaking out of order, states his belief that the testimony of the woman across the street proves the boy’s guilt. She had said in her testimony that she was looking out her window and saw the kid stick the knife into his father, and that she saw this even though an el train (elevated train) was passing between their apartments at just that moment. Juror Ten notes that the lawyers proved that you *could* see what’s happening through the windows of an el train at night. Juror Eight wonders why Juror Ten believes the woman’s testimony, when she is also one of “them” who are untrustworthy according to Ten. Juror Four pushes the point that the lawyers took the jurors to the el track and they were able to see what was happening on the other side.

Juror Six adds that the witnesses from across the hall were convincing. He brings up their testimony that they heard the father hit the boy and the boy walk out. Six notes that this doesn’t prove anything, but that it’s “part of the picture.”

Juror Seven brings up the kid’s record of stealing, knife fighting, and other crimes, sarcastically calling him a “very fine boy.” When Juror Eight brings up that the boy’s father beat him, Juror Seven retorts that he deserved it. Juror Three bitterly agrees, and lashes out against all “kids.” He says that he has had a falling out with his own son who disappointed him. His son ran from a fight when he was eight, and his father was ashamed of him. Later in life, the two are not in touch with each other. He cuts off his story as he gets more emotional.

Two’s weak attempt to state why he voted “guilty” allows the jurors to revisit the idea of “beyond a reasonable doubt.” Two does not consider where the burden of proof lies (with the prosecution) and makes a decision based more on instinct than understanding. Later in the play, Two is shown to be easily persuaded and influenced by persuasive language rather than facts.



Three realizes that Two has not been persuasive because he has not presented facts. Three claims an interest in the facts, but more often restricts his arguments to verbally supporting Four when he presents facts and logical reasoning. Eight’s response to these facts shows that he has not prepared a definitive counter-argument, but simply feels uncertainty about the “facts.”



Juror Ten establishes the other main piece of evidence: the testimony of the woman across the street. Eight points out the hypocrisy in Ten trusting the neighboring woman from the slums when he won’t trust the kid and universalized his distrust to all people from slums. This mismatch reveals that Ten’s prejudice is inconsistent. He is ready to see the kid, as a representative of the slums, be punished for the crimes of “his people.” Four, again, returns to rational argument over personal motives.



Six speaks little, but he’s interested in questions of character and motive. He sees the kid as not deserving of sympathy for his hard life, but conversely as all the more ready to lash out because of that hard life.



Three’s confession about his relationship with his own son provides key information about what motivates his character. Because Three has a poor relationship with his son, he sees all young men as ungrateful and difficult. He lashes out against the accused kid because he cannot lash out against his own son from whom he is estranged. His “guilty” vote is connected to the most profound kind of emotion. Seven is similarly unsympathetic with the kid.



Juror Four says it's not relevant why many criminals come from slums, which they all "know". Juror Five responds by telling of growing up in a slum and playing in a place full of garbage. When the Foreman interrupts to say no one is personally attacking anyone else in the jury room, Juror Five slams his hand on the table, saying that it *is* personal. Juror Three tries to calm Juror Five down, and there is a long silence. Eventually, Juror Eleven comments that he can understand why Juror Five is sensitive.

Juror Eight finally takes his turn. He begins by saying that he doesn't like how many questions the defense counsel left unasked or unanswered. Juror Four agrees that the defense was bad, but doesn't think it matters to the boy's guilt.

Juror Three brings up one of the "answered" questions, the **switch knife** the boy bought. Juror Eight responds by asking to see the knife again—the Foreman looks at him questioningly before talking to the guard. Juror Three doesn't want to look at the knife again, but backs down when Juror Four asserts Juror Eight's right to see the evidence.

As the guard goes to get the **switch knife**, Juror Four leads the jury in establishing the facts surrounding the knife. The boy went out of the house and bought an unusual switchblade knife, the only one the storekeeper says he had in stock. Juror Three tells all the jurors to listen to Juror Four, who "knows what he's talking about." The murder weapon was found at the scene without any fingerprints on it. The boy claims, however, that the knife must've fallen through a hole in his pocket because he never saw it again. Juror Four says that what "actually happened" was that the boy stabbed his father with the knife and remembered to wipe his fingerprints.

Juror Four, now holding the **switch knife** that has been brought back into the room by the guard, challenges Juror Eight on who could possibly have picked up the knife when the boy dropped it and stabbed the boy's father. Juror Eight says it's just possible that the boy did lose the knife, and someone else stabbed the father with a similar knife. Juror Four thinks the knife is unique and Juror Eight's scenario would be an impossible coincidence, but Juror Eight takes from his pocket a switch knife that is exactly alike the one in evidence, and slams it into the wall. There are gasps and a long silence. Juror Ten shouts, "who do you think you are?" The Foreman shouts for quiet.

Four is not interested in persuading the jurors biased against people from slums to feel differently, but he is interested in overlooking any personal biases in favor of facts. Five sees this as another assumption that all people from slums are criminals. Five most closely resembles the kid in age and circumstance and feels he is being targeted.



Eight's criticism of the defense raises the question of whether or not the trial was fair and if the lawyers themselves may have been prejudiced (or, perhaps, if the poor criminal was assigned bad lawyers based on some kind of systemic bias). Four thinks they can determine the truth, regardless.



Eight's request to see the switch knife sets in motion a more thorough examination of the evidence from the trial. Three resists this all along, not because he has elsewhere to be, like Seven, but because he has a deep emotional connection to a "guilty" verdict makes him feel hostile toward Eight throughout.



Four lays out the "facts" of the kid's purchase and use of the switch knife. He recounts the boy's version of the story, and the truth, as he sees it. Four demonstrates his rhetorical skills and Three supports him because he is excited and impressed to have someone articulate the case against the kid so well. Four's version of the "facts" relies on defining the kid's testimony as a lie.



Four assumes that if the kid bought a switch knife that appears the same as the murder weapon, it must be the same knife. The unique appearance of the knife supports this idea, but Eight producing an identical knife causes the jurors to realize that it wouldn't be impossible—wouldn't perhaps be beyond a reasonable doubt—that the boy lost one knife and an unconnected person used a second knife. This dramatic reveal, complete with stabbing the matching knife into the wall, shows that, to some extent, Eight has planned his defense of the kid.



Juror Eight reveals that he bought the **switch knife** he just slammed into the wall for 2 dollars at a junk shop near the boy's house. Juror Three calls Juror Eight's move a smart trick, insisting still that the boy lied. Juror Eight offers a possible scenario where the boy didn't lie: he might've snuck into the movies to watch them (his alibi) and not been seen by the cashier. He appeals to the jury to be understanding of the boy sneaking in. Juror Eleven says he never once snuck in—they didn't have movies when he was growing up.

Juror Eight asks the jurors whether they think the boy lied. Juror Ten and Juror Four both think it is a stupid question with an obvious answer. Juror Five looks around before answering that he's not sure.

Juror Seven tells Juror Eight "you're alone". Angrily, he accuses Juror Eight of being stubborn and says Juror Eight will accomplish nothing even if he hangs the jury. Juror Eight agrees that he probably won't convince the others to change their minds and he just wants to talk about the details of the case. Juror Seven angrily responds that he doesn't want to stay all night, deliberating. Juror Nine retorts that it's just one night, and a boy's life is at stake.

Juror Four comments that Juror Eight obviously thinks the boy is not guilty. Juror Eight responds only that he has a doubt. But, Juror Four argues, Juror Eight hasn't presented anything to explain his doubt. The jurors list their evidence: the old man heard the kid's shriek, the woman across the el tracks saw the murder occur, the boy had a **switch knife** like the murder weapon, the boy's alibi is weak, and the boy did fight with his father. Juror Four adds that the boy is a violent kid "all the way," though he then weakly acknowledges that that doesn't prove anything.

Juror Eight proposes another vote by **secret ballot** of just the 11 who voted "guilty" last time—meaning everyone other than him. He says that if all the votes stay the same, then he will vote "guilty" too. Juror Seven, Juror Four, Juror Twelve and the Foreman quickly agree, while Juror Eleven agrees more slowly. The men write down their votes and pass them to the Foreman. The Foreman counts the votes, and pauses at one that is "not guilty". Juror Ten is immediately angry, while Juror Seven, snarling, demands to know who voted "not guilty." He says the other jurors have a right to know.

The availability of the switch knife shows that any number of people may have acquired a similar knife. Three calls Eight's act a "trick," which shows that he sees Eight as trying to intentionally manipulate the opinions of the other jurors. Eight's version of the truth relies on believing the kid's testimony. Eleven's objection allows the audience to be sympathetic with his situation.



Ten, Four, and Five show how their backgrounds influence them to either instinctively believe or distrust the kid.



Seven's discussion of Eight being alone raises the theme of stubbornness vs. taking a stand. Is Eight being contrary for the sake of doing so? Ought he give in to the overwhelming popular opinion? Or is he expressing courage in standing alone? Nine supports him against Seven because he is aware that a life is at stake, and that Eight is standing alone is courageous.



Four points out that Eight has not described the facts that have produced his doubt. Four's evidence sticks to facts with the exception of identifying the kid's character as "violent." His retracting of this information shows his emphasis on the importance of concrete facts even if he himself is subject to assumptions about the kid (for example, that he'd lie) because of his character.



The secret ballot represents an attempt at pure justice. In the first vote, some jurors were influenced by others. Five and Eleven have shown deference to other jurors who are unkind to them, and have backed off their statements. The reaction of Ten and Seven to the single changed vote shows the importance of a secret ballot: it protects the person who is willing to disagree with the others.



ACT 2

Juror Seven and Juror Three insist that they want to know who changed his vote. Juror Eleven interrupts, reminding them that this was a vote by **secret ballot**. Three says that "there are no secrets here" and that Juror Eight has come in to the jury room and been "tearing out your hearts" with stories of a poor kid who couldn't have acted differently. He says that they're just listening to Eight's fairytales.

Eleven says he thought that in America a man was *entitled* to have an unpopular opinion. He thinks this right should be protected because it was not protected in the country that he came from. Ten interrupts saying sarcastically that now they have to listen to Eleven talk about his country again.

Seven assumes that it was Five who changed his vote, and asks what it was that made him change. As Three and Seven insist that Five tell them, Nine interrupts that he was the one who changed his vote. Nine explains that he recognized Eight's courage in being willing to stand alone and gamble for support, and, because of that, Nine changed his vote and wants to hear more from Eight.

The foreman removes the **switch knife** from the wall and returns it to the guard at the door. Four and Two chat apart from the others at the water cooler. Four says that he would vote "not guilty" if he could see any evidence in the accused kid's favor. Two agrees that the kid is clearly guilty. Four wonders what "guilty beyond a reasonable doubt" really means. Four points out that two men believe there is a reason for doubt and he wonders why.

Four and Two reflect that sometimes a guilty man is released and sometimes an innocent man is accused. Three apologizes to Five saying that he didn't mean anything personal by his accusation that Five was the one who changed his vote.

Seven asks Eight who killed the father if the kid was not the murderer. He wonders who else could have had a motive for doing so. Eight says perhaps someone with an old grudge. Nine says it's not easy to explain his doubt, and that it's only a feeling that he has. Ten complains that they're going to spend the night talking about feelings to the exclusion of facts.

Seven and Three feel entitled to know who changed his vote because they are used to getting their ways. They appear to be more upset at being thwarted than anything else. Three characterizes Eight's actions as pleas of sympathy for the kid, not rational argument.



Eleven's profound reminder of the freedom of speech in America engages with how this play reflects both the strengths and practical weaknesses of America. Often a great ideal is not upheld in practice.



Seven and Three target Five because he is a vulnerable target, as a young man similar to the accused in the case. Nine reveals that he changed his vote in order to protect Five from these attacks. Nine shows a generosity of spirit, and a particular interest in anyone who stands alone.

The topic of "reasonable doubt" reappears in the play as Two and Four question the meaning of the phrase. Four hopes for evidence in favor of the kid, which shows an inclination to treat the debate as one between guilt and innocence, rather than (as it should be by law) seeing the accused as innocent until proven guilty.



Calm is restored with Three's apology. Larger philosophical questions of justice are raised by Four and Two's discussion. The debate moves away from emotional drama.



Seven provides another misconception about justice: that someone must be blamed for a crime. If not the kid, then who? Eight's reminder that they must focus on the kid is unsatisfying to Seven. Ten, hypocritically, accuses Nine of prioritizing feeling over facts.



Three says the old man heard the kid yell at his father, "I'm going to kill you," and then heard a body hit the floor before seeing the kid running down the stairs. Twelve says the woman across the street looked into the open window and saw the murder occur. Three says this ought to be enough evidence to convince anyone. But Eight says it's not enough for him.

Four points out that the woman across the street remembers the most insignificant details in her testimony, including that she saw the murder occur through the last two car windows of a passing elevated train. Three starts a game of tic-tac-toe, but Eight says this isn't the time for games and snatches the paper away. A man's life is at stake, Eight reminds them. Three is angry, but Seven calms him down, while the Foreman says he doesn't want any fights in the jury room.

When quiet is restored, Eight asks the other jurors how long they think it takes an elevated train to pass a given point. Five guesses 10 or 12 seconds and Two agrees. Eight asks if anyone in the jury room has ever lived near el tracks. Five says he has and acknowledges that the sound as a train passes is incredibly loud. Eight then points out that the old man swore he heard the kid's scream and the body fall. The woman across the street saw the murder through the final two cars of the elevated train. Therefore, the train had been passing for at least six seconds when the old man might have heard the noises upstairs.

Eight says it's not possible that the old man could have heard what he claims to have heard. Two agrees and Three asks whether they are calling the old man a liar. He asks why the old man would lie. Nine replies that he looked at the old man for a long time and he noticed the seam of his jacket was split under the arm. He recognized that the old man would have lived a quiet and insignificant life and that he may have wanted to be recognized and listened to in his old age.

Nine says that the old man wouldn't lie, but he might make himself believe something that wasn't actually true. Nine says he's not making this up and that he knows about this feeling this from experience. Three says Nine is admitting that he's a liar, but Eight argues he's only explaining the old man's possible motives.

Three and Twelve feel that the two testimonies provide sufficient evidence to convince anyone beyond a reasonable doubt, but Eight disagrees. Eight shows that testimonies can be believed or not on the basis of their consistency (not on character judgments).



Four, on the other hand, is persuaded by a character judgment of the woman across the street: she, like himself, is detail-oriented. Three has grown increasingly angry, as Eight has thwarted his goals. When Three seems no longer able to immediately convince Eight, he tries to ignore and belittle him by playing a game instead of listening.



Eight's argument that the old man downstairs could not have heard the kid yell or the body fall over the sounds of the passing elevated train continues to tackle the theme of certainty and doubt. Until this point, the other jurors have been certain of the kid's guilt. Nine changed his vote to give Eight a chance. Eight concern introduces the first real doubt. Eight's convincing rhetoric involves first asking for opinions of the time it takes a train to pass a given point.



Three and Nine are interested in the old man's character and his reasons for lying, demonstrating a common feeling among the jurors that one's character and motives should be examined. It is enough for Eight that the old man seems to have been wrong, but Nine interprets his motives by identifying with him.



The idea of convincing oneself of a falsehood adds complexity to the theme of certainty and doubt. To what extent can one be certain about any experience? Does one need to lie in order to be wrong? Eight defends Nine's actions in identifying with the old man.



The Foreman encourages the jurors to refocus on their job. Two offers a cough drop and Eight accepts one. Then he raises another point. He says that even if the old man could have heard the kid yell, "I'm going to kill you," the boy probably wasn't using this phrase to indicate a literal desire to kill. He points out that all of them have at times yelled, "I'm going to kill you" in every day settings, when they didn't really intend to kill someone.

Three disagrees and says that *the way* the kid said it indicates that he meant it. He screamed it at the top of his lungs. Eight asks him if he thinks the boy would shout out his intentions for the whole neighborhood to hear moments before killing his father. Ten says that the kid is not bright enough to consider such a risk. Five says that he would like to change his vote to "not guilty."

Four asks Five to explain why he's changed his vote. Five says that he thinks there is a reasonable doubt. Ten says that Eight has talked Five into believing a fairytale. Five says maybe the old man didn't lie, but maybe he did. Seven says that Eight ought to write for *Amazing Detective Monthly* because he's great at making up stories.

Seven wants to know why the kid's lawyer wouldn't have brought up the points that Eight has raised. Five says that lawyers can't think of everything. Seven, exasperated, asks whether, because of Eight, they are supposed to believe the old man didn't get up and run to the door to see the kid after the murder? Five asks if the old man said he ran to the door. Four says that the old man said that he "went" to the door.

Eight asks the jurors where the old man's bedroom was in his apartment because he doesn't remember. Ten says that he thought Eight remembered everything. The Foreman requests the floor plan of the apartments from the Guard at the door. Three asks, why it is that Eight is the one who always wants to see exhibits from the trial. Five and Nine quickly add that they want to see this exhibit as well.

Eight's acceptance of the cough drop shows that he is receptive to the thoughts and kindnesses of others. Two perhaps could tell that Eight had been speaking a lot and is tacitly offering his support. Eight's argument about the non-literal meanings of "I'm going to kill you" shows language can be interpreted in a variety of ways.



Three argues that emotion behind words, rather than the words themselves, is more important. Ten stays true to character. Five's vote change marks the first additional character beginning to doubt. Five is predisposed to do so by his awareness of the kid's similarities to himself.



Four, Ten, and Seven see Five's vote change as the product of emotional persuasion rather than reason. Eight's ability to bring other possible explanations to life does seem to be key in Five allowing himself to support the kid.



The quality of the defense lawyers is again called into question. In restating the old man's testimony, Seven states something (the old man "ran") that logically contradicts his appearance and abilities (walks with two canes). Five picks up on this discrepancy.



Eight has introduced reasonable doubt by pointing out discrepancies in the old man's testimony and Five picks up this approach as well. The request for the floor plan is therefore second by Five and Nine because they can see where Eight is headed with his line of reasoning. The jurors who earlier just wanted to get this trial over with are now starting to engage in earnest with the evidence – they are treating the trial and its process and their responsibility with respect. And as they do so the personal differences that separate these jurors seem a little less important, a little less divisive.



Eight wonders whether an old man who has had two strokes in the past three years and who uses a pair of canes to walk could get to the door in the 15 seconds that he said it took him to do so. Nine reminds them that the old man was very positive about the length of time. Three says that the witness is an old man, and half the time he was confused, so how could he be positive about anything? As he speaks, he quickly realizes his error and looks around embarrassed.

Seven and Ten are not thrilled to look at the diagram of the apartments again. Four says that others are interested, and invites Eight to go ahead. Eight reviews the testimony: the old man was in bed, he got up, went down the hall, opened the front door and saw the kid running down the stairs. All this, he said, took 15 seconds.

Eight calculates the distance from the bed to the bedroom door plus the length of the hallway. Eleven points out that the old man had to be helped into the witness chair and could only move very slowly. Nine says, "it's a long walk for a man who uses canes." Eight paces off the distance on the floor of the jury room.

Ten says that Eight's plan is insane and that he can't recreate the old man's movements. Eight asks to have the chance to try because, according to Ten, it ought to take only 15 seconds. Two says he has a watch with a second hand. He stamps his foot to indicate the body falling to the ground, and Eight starts to walk slowly.

Ten tells Eight to speed up to match the old man's pace. Eight speeds up slightly. He devotes time to retrieving invisible canes and opening the doors. When he reaches the end of the distance, Two says that his movements took 39 seconds. Four points out that the old man swore under oath that it took 15 seconds. Eleven, the Foreman, and Four acknowledge that there is a dramatic difference between 15 and 39 seconds. Eight guesses that the old man was moving toward the door and heard someone on the stairs, but didn't see the person and assumed it was the kid.

Three says that Eight is making up wild stories because he feels sorry for slum kids. He says the kid is guilty and he must pay. Eight asks if Three is the kid's executioner. Three responds that he is one of them. Eight says he feels sorry for Three because Three would happily let the kid die. He says Three wants this for personal reasons and not because of facts. Three angrily lunges at Eight, but is restrained by other jurors as he yells, "let me go! I'll kill him." Eight asks, "you don't really mean you'll kill me do you?"

Nine's support of Eight as he questions the old man's testimony is similar to the way Three supported Four while the latter laid out a logical argument. Three traps himself in his fervor to discount the old man and uphold his testimony at the same time. Three makes numerous errors in judgment and changes his approach many times.



Seven and Ten express their characteristic distaste and disinterest. Four, though opposed to Eight's ideas, is always moderate and willing to listen. Eight reviews the old man's testimony, which provides these details to the audience, as well.



As Eight calculates the distance the old man had to move, Eleven joins the approach of pointing out discrepancies by reminding the other jurors of the slow pace of the old man. It's clear that Eleven and Nine can see where Eight's argument is headed.



Ten's objection to Eight's reenactment is reasonable compared to his previous prejudiced objections. There are many unknowns about the old man's movements, but this only further raises a sense of doubt about the true events of the night of the murder.



This second part of Eight's argument (creating a story of what happened) seems to reinforce Ten and Three's accusations. Eight is, in many ways, a persuasive storyteller. At the same time, his story is based on a more thorough examination of the evidence than the "stories" the other jurors believed initially.



Three and Eight's clash finally becomes personal as Eight pries at the heart of Three's reasons for feeling strongly about the case. Three personally wants the kid to die, and when this is exposed he reacts with anger, only confirming the truth of the accusation. Three proves Eight was right: "I'll kill you" may be shouted in a variety of contexts, with a variety of meanings. "Obvious" interpretations are not always so obvious. One must test them with doubt.



ACT 3

The Guard enters the jury room because he heard the shouting. The Foreman says there's nothing wrong and returns the diagram of the apartments. The jurors are silent. Three asks them what they're looking at, but everyone is silent. Eventually Four points out that he can't see why they're behaving like children. Eleven says they have an important responsibility to decide on the guilt or innocence of another person and they shouldn't make this a personal decision.

Nine thanks Eleven for reminding them of their opportunity to be unbiased judges. Four says he's glad that they can be civilized about this process. Six proposes another vote. Three says he wants it to be an open ballot vote, so they know where each juror stands. The Foreman, Three, Four, Seven, Ten, and Twelve vote guilty. Two, Five, Six, Eight, Nine, and Eleven vote not guilty. The vote is evenly split.

Three says that he's ready to declare a hung jury. Four asks Eleven, Two, and Six why they changed their minds. Six says it seems the old man did not see the boy run downstairs nor could he have heard the scream. He also says that if the kid did yell, "I'm going to kill you" then Three's actions show that this doesn't mean anything about intent.

The Foreman says he doesn't think they'll ever agree on anything. Eight points out that at first he was alone, but now five others agree with him. Three says that he'll never be convinced. Twelve says they're a hung jury. Eight insists they won't be a hung jury.

The Foreman proposes another vote to determine whether or not the jurors think they're a hung jury. Eleven says they can't even agree on whether or not **the window** should be open. The other jurors agree to a vote on the question of whether they're a hung jury. This vote will determine whether or not they'll keep discussing the case. This vote is split 6 to 6 as well.

Four decides to change his vote and says, "we are not a hung jury" because he believes the kid is guilty. The discussion must go on. Four asks Two why he changed his mind. Two says that Eight seemed confident and made good arguments, while Three grew angry and mean. Four says these considerations don't change the guilt of the boy.

The Guard's intervention shows that the situation in the jury room has gotten out of hand. The silence of the other jurors shows that the tide has turned against Three in favor of Eight. Three shows how one's actions impact how others think about the things they say. Three undermines his goal that the kid should die.



Eleven and Four help return the group to a sense of normalcy. Six's proposal of another vote is revealed to be due to his own changed opinion. Three's insistence on an open ballot shows Three's nature as a bully: he wants to know whom to target and distrust.



Six's changed mind is due, in part, to Three's actions rather than simply the new doubts about the evidence. Three's willingness to declare a hung jury shows his exasperation and anger because he believes another jury would convict the kid.



The Foreman loses hope of a unanimous decision, but, unlike Three, this isn't due to his stubbornness or anger. Three's actions show stubbornness for the sake stubbornness.



The vote to determine whether or not they are a hung jury engages the themes of justice and certainty versus doubt. The jurors need to decide whether or not they'll agree and this depends on how strongly they feel confident of their votes.



Four, true to his rational character, realizes he cannot sacrifice his certainty of the kid's guilt. Until the end, Four is one of the most certain jurors (more so even than Eight, who works off of a feeling). Two shows his persuadable nature.



Four says he doesn't think there is a doubt. He says that the track of the train is straight in front of that building and that trains are loudest when going around curves. Therefore, the old man might have heard a high-pitched scream. Four also asks, what if the old man was wrong about how long it took him to get to the door, but right about seeing the kid running down the stairs? He points out that the absence of fingerprints on the knife must mean that the killer took time to wipe the fingerprints away.

Four says that it may have taken the murderer about 39 seconds (the same time they calculated it took the old man to move from his bedroom to the hallway door) to clean the fingerprints and get down the stairs, so the old man could have seen him. The Foreman says that they reconstructed the old man's movements and timed them, so they should also reconstruct and time the crime.

Three is very supportive of Four as he starts to outline his reasoning. He offers the knife to Eight, saying he can do the stabbing in the reenactment, but Four says he'll do it. Three proposes that Seven be the one to be stabbed and fall. Four asks whether the murderer might look at his victim for a second or two. Eight says that seems reasonable. Three points out that the father may have writhed around for a few seconds, and the kid may have stood there watching. Perhaps the kid held his father's mouth to prevent him from crying out.

Four also points out that anyone who would wipe the fingerprints from a knife would pay attention to other incriminating clues. The jurors should take into consideration the time it takes to wipe fingerprints off the doorknob, as well as the knife. Four appeals to Two to time this reenactment as well. Two waits for a few seconds, saying he wants the second hand to be at 60 and then stamps his foot. Four reenact the crime. He cries out, "I'm going to kill you," stabs downward, Seven collapses, Seven writhes, Four stares at him, Four cleans the knife, he looks around to check the room, he rushes to the door and clean the doorknob on both sides, before calling to Two to stop. Two says that took 29 and a half seconds.

Four points out that their reenactment didn't take the time it took the kid to run down the stairs into consideration. Four says the old man may have been wrong about the time it took him to move to the door, but it is still reasonable to assume he might have seen the kid running down the stairs. Four says the old man's story may well be true. Eight agrees, except for the fact that the old man swore it was only 15 seconds. Eight says they are now accusing the old man of lying in one case and telling the truth in another.

Four's counter-argument shows how speculation about possibilities other than the kid's guilt can be countered by further speculation. He doesn't realize the logical error in departing even further from the facts presented in court by speculating about what parts of the testimonies were lies or truths (and casting further doubt on the testimonies).



Four's reenactment parallels and compliments Eight's reenactment, but now the same method is used on the opposite side of the argument. Because this first reenactment was accepted, the jurors feel the need to accept the second reenactment, as well.



Three appears as Four's assistant throughout the reenactment, egging him on and organizing the steps of the crime. Four's reenactment involves even more logical assumptions than Eight's reenactment—Would the killer look at this victim? For how long? These assumptions require the jurors to put themselves in the shoes of the murderer and consider what he would do.



Four emerges as a "rational" opponent to Eight, as opposed to Three who bases his belief in the kid's guilt on emotion. Yet now, under Four's influence, the jury is aggressively thinking through the evidence—the give and take between Four and Eight is not personal or angry, and leads to deeper understanding. The jury may still not be in agreement, but even in their disagreements, and because of their disagreements, they are doing their job.



Four's reenactment supposes that the old man was wrong about some things (the time it took to get to the door), but right about other things (who he saw). The one problem seems to be the old man's insistence on it being only 15 seconds. Eight focuses again on the integrity of the evidence and the integrity of the interpretation of that evidence. He wants to make sure that if they are going to come to a guilty verdict that they first investigate every reasonable doubt.



Two says that he will change his vote once more back to guilty. Six says he's not sure and wants to talk some more. He says he's "sort of swinging back toward guilty." Eleven says he is now in real doubt. Five says, "guilty. I was right the first time." The vote is 9 to 3 in favor of guilty.

Eight asks one more question about the old man downstairs. He wants to know who among the jurors lives in an apartment building. Eleven says he doesn't, but he remembers visiting the scene of the crime with the other jurors and reminds them all of how dark the hall was and how they stumbled on the steps. Eleven says the old man claims he recognized a running figure in that very dark hallway. Three says Eleven is just making things up.

Twelve says that they ought to admit they are a hung jury. Eleven asks Seven if he truly believes there is no reasonable doubt. Seven says yes, and Eleven questions whether he understands the term "reasonable doubt." Seven angrily asks who Eleven is to talk to him like that. He says that Eleven came to America running for his life, and now he's telling another man how America works. Four says no one is asking where anyone else in the jury room comes from or where their fathers come from. Eight says maybe it wouldn't hurt them all to learn from an immigrant because they are not without fault.

Seven apologizes and asks Eight if that apology was what he was looking for. Eight says it was. The Foreman says that they should all stop arguing and focus on constructive ideas only. Two says there's something that's been bothering him: the stab wound made at a downward angle. Three says that was gone over in court extensively. Two says he wasn't convinced. It seems like the shorter kid should not have stabbed his taller father with a downward stroke.

Three says that he'll demonstrate how a shorter man could kill a taller man with a downward stroke of a **switch knife**. Eight stands up and Three takes the knife before crouching down to be 6 inches shorter than Eight. He opens the knife and holds it up before stabbing downward. Two cries, "look out!" But Three stops the knife just shy of Eight's chest. Six and Five don't find it funny, although Three laughs.

While Eight is not persuaded, others are. Two shows his indecisiveness and lack of confidence in his own opinion. Five satisfaction about feeling "right" suggests a personal motivation that is separate from caring about eliminating all doubt. Eleven has the opposite reaction: any oscillating convinces him of his doubt.



Eleven takes up Eight's style of reasoning. He immediately sees the problem with identifying a person running down the stairs in the dark apartment building when Eight introduces the subject. Eight has slowly helped others see his doubt by pointing out aspects of testimonies that seem improbable.



Eleven and Seven clash again, and this time on a more significant topic than having the window open or closed. Seven sees Eleven as an outsider, and, therefore, as less knowledgeable about America. Four points out the hypocrisy in Seven's statements. Seven falls silent when Four says no one is asking where anyone's father came from. It is implied that Seven's father was an immigrant and just as much of an "outsider." Eight's comment that they all have faults is another way of saying they could all be wrong, and by extension that doing everything they can to face and overcome their doubts is the only way to counteract the normal human tendency to make mistakes, to be wrong.



Although Seven apologizes, he directs his sarcasm at Eight, and shows little true repentance. Two also begins to notice discrepancies as he points out the type of stab wound as a cause for doubt. Like Eight, he homes in on a detail that seems improbable. Notice how Three is often trying not to investigate, not to face the evidence and wrestle with doubt.



Three and Eight physically embody their conflict, which has been limited to words, as they reenact the stabbing, up until the vital moment. The reaction of the other jurors shows that the tension between Three and Eight is extreme. Three's laughter gives him a maniacal edge.



Eight says that nobody's hurt and Three says that he just demonstrated how he'd stop a taller man. Six says, "I guess there's no argument." Eight asks Six if he's ever stabbed a man and Six says no. Eight asks Three who also says no, so Eight asks how he knows how a stabbing is done. Eight wants to know if Three has ever seen a man stabbed. Three has not.

Eight points out that the kid was an experienced knife fighter; he was sent to reform school for stabbing someone else. Eight says that holding the knife overhand seems like an awkward way to handle it. Five suddenly exclaims that he has seen knife fights before in his community. "Far too many of them," he says, and adds that it's funny he didn't think about this before, but he guesses that one tries to forget those kind of negative memories.

Five says that a **switch knife** is always used underhanded, and that anyone who has used such a knife before would never stab downward. Eight confirms that the kid could not have made the type of downward stab that killed his father. Three and Ten are not convinced. Seven says that they're not making any progress.

Eight asks for the chance to try to pull this evidence together. Eight requests that the jurors look at the situation logically and consistently. He asks them: is the kid smart or is the kid dumb? Eight says that this kid is experienced with a **switch knife**, and it would take a very stupid kid to buy a knife and then murder a man with that knife on the very same night. Eight says it would take a smart kid, on the other hand, to remember, in a moment of great emotion and anger, to use a different type of stabbing that would not be associated with him. A smart kid would wipe the fingerprints away and might wait until the train was passing in order to cover the noise of the murder.

Nine says that because the woman across the tracks saw the murder, someone else on the train might've also seen the murder. It would take a dumb kid to take that chance. Eight continues the kid is dumb enough to use an obvious **switch knife**, but then becomes smart in the moment of using that knife. He's dumb enough to kill his father as the train passes, but smart enough to clean the fingerprints. For the boy to be guilty, he would have to change from dumb to smart and back again. He would have to be dumb enough that he couldn't even come up with a good alibi. This much inconsistency shows that there is a reasonable doubt.

Six is persuaded, but stopped in his tracks by Eight's point that neither he nor Three has no real knowledge about switch knife fighting. Eight argues that they should only base their assumptions on experience, on what they know. Assumptions must be understood within the limitations of what they've experienced.



The kid has experience with switch knife fights, as does Five. Earlier many of the other jurors seemed to dismiss five, but now his expertise is important as the other jurors consider Five's first person knowledge of knife fights to be acceptable and convincing evidence. Again, Five's similarities to the accused kid are reinforced.



Five's knowledge confirms that the kid would have to act like an inexperienced switch knife fighter to make the fatal wound, and he is not inexperienced. This does not convince the jurors who have only emotional reasons for accusing the kid.



Eight's comprehensive argument for reasonable doubt is once again an example of his ability to put together a good narrative. But the point is not that Eight is saying "here's what happened" in the same way Three is with his "the kid is guilty position." Instead, Eight is showing that there are doubtful elements to the "he is guilty" narrative that initially were easy to overlook. Eight just refuses to overlook them.



Nine adds his thoughts to Eight's line of reasoning, using the same approach. Inconsistency is again linked to reasonable doubt. Eight is not trying to prove the kid is smart or dumb—he's not focused on the kid's character or traits. He's trying to show that the story of the kid's guilt can only make sense if you accept a strange inconsistency in the kid's character.



Eight says that the old man downstairs swore it took him 15 seconds to move from his bedroom to the door, but it must've been almost 40 seconds. Nine asks, can the old man lie only part of the time? Eight says that for the kid to be guilty he must be both stupid and smart and for the kid to be guilty the old man must be a liar and not a liar. All this leads to reasonable doubt. Seven says that he now feels a reasonable doubt.

Eight calls for another vote and the Foreman says they will vote by show of hands. He asks that all those voting "not guilty" raise their hands. Every hand is raised except those of Three, Four, and Ten. Ten says he cannot understand how others believe the kid is innocent. He says that "those people" always lie and that they don't feel the same way about killing as others do. He says that violence is part of their natures and that they don't care about human life. As he speaks, Five gets up from the table and goes to **the window**, then Nine gets up and goes to the window, and then Seven does.

Ten says that "those people" are always drinking and fighting and that if someone gets killed it doesn't matter. Eight, Two, and Six go to **the window**. Ten says he's known some of these people and they have no feelings. The Foreman, Seven, and Twelve go to the window. Ten says these people are no good and this kid is one of them. Three stays at the table, while Four gets up and moves towards Ten. Ten wonders what's going on and why no one is listening to him. Four stands over him until Ten grows silent.

Four threatens Ten that if he speaks up again he'll "split [his] skull." There is a long pause. Four tells everyone to sit down and the jurors return to their seats. Four says he still believes the boy is guilty and that the most important evidence comes from the testimony of the woman across the street. Three instantly agrees, also saying that this is the most important testimony.

Eight suggests they go over the woman's testimony in detail. Four says that the woman explained how she went to bed at 11 o'clock next to the open window, and that from the window she could see into the window across the street. She was unable to fall sleep and turned to the window at 12:10 AM. She saw the kid stab his father. Four says that in view of this testimony, he can't vote "not guilty."

The same process of reasoning is undergone for the old man downstairs: is he a liar or is he not? An inconsistency in lies and truth telling calls everything into doubt. Seven is convinced. Throughout, Seven has been particularly engaged when topics of truth and lies are raised. So questioning the old man's testimony finally convinces him.



The tide has shifted in Eight's favor, as all are convinced of reasonable doubt except Three, Four, and Ten. Ten is angrily spurred to reveal the full extent of his hatred and prejudice. The moment in which the other jurors move to the window is important: it is a rejection, by this set of people now acting as a group, not just of juror Ten but the prejudice-based arguments he is making. The window was originally an object of division among the jurors. Now it is a symbol of most of the jury rejecting the prejudices of Ten, even as they regard the world outside the jury room through that window.



Ten's prejudice shows "us versus them" thinking. He identifies all the jurors as being among a good "us" and the kid among a bad "them," despite Five's background and the diverse backgrounds of other jurors. This prejudice is clear and cruel. Three, in his need for the kid to be guilty, stands with Ten.



Four cannot stand Ten's prejudice and threatens violence. This power play puts Ten in his place because Four, who still believes the kid is guilty, is reacting to his prejudice and not his judgment of the kid's crime. Four returns the discussion to rational analysis.



Eight's suggestion that they go over the testimony in detail is familiar. He looks for any discrepancies that make the woman's story improbable. Four accepts the story at face value, and, without it being discredited, cannot vote "not guilty." Reasonable doubt is a high bar for him.



Three says that the other evidence is unimportant compared to this testimony. Four says that Eight has made good points, but how can they doubt the story of the woman. Six wonders if they could go home and finish their discussion in the morning, mentioning that his child is sick. Eight asks Two if he can see the clock without his glasses. Two says he can't see it clearly.

Three makes the dramatic statement that this testimony alone matters (though of course he says so because he wants the kid to be guilty and this evidence seems strong to him). Six's statement reminds the audience of a world beyond the jury room, but now the other jurors ignore him when earlier they were all clamoring to leave. The jury is engaged in the evidence, engaged in their responsibility.



Eight asks Two what he does when he wakes up at night and wants to know the time and Two says he puts on his glasses. Four says he lies in bed and waits for the clock to chime. Eight asks Two if he wears his glasses to bed. Eight points out that the woman who testified was wearing glasses. Eleven excitedly remembers that she wore bifocals. Four says it's funny that he hadn't thought of that.

Eight uses his familiar rhetorical approach: he asks questions about glasses in order to get the jurors to agree before pointing out that the woman across the street wore glasses. Likewise, he got the jurors to agree on the movements of the train before pointing out that this would drown out a scream.



Eight says that he suspects the woman wouldn't have put on her glasses to glance out the window. The lights went out a second later, and she wouldn't have had time to put her glasses on. He says this woman may have thought she saw the kid in the act of killing, but she might have only seen a blur. Three wonders how Eight could know these ideas he proposes.

Eight proposes another theory about the woman's actions, as he did with the old man downstairs. The woman didn't put on her glasses and the old man didn't get to the door in time. The jurors, despite Eight's best attempts, can't know if the kid is innocent. But they do doubt his guilt.



Eight asks if anyone still thinks there is not a reasonable doubt. Ten says he thinks there is doubt. Three says that he still votes "guilty." Four says he is convinced there is a reasonable doubt. Eight tells Three that he's alone. The Foreman says that there are 11 votes for "not guilty" and one for "guilty."

Three maintains his "guilty" vote despite Ten and Four being persuaded. Eight's reminder that Three is alone creates a parallel with the beginning of the play when Three tried to convince Eight to give up his solitary "not guilty" vote.



Eight asks Three for his arguments in favor of the kid's guilt. He says that they have time to keep discussing the case. Three appeals to Four, reminding him that he was the one with all the great arguments and he can't change his mind when a guilty man is going to be walking the streets. Four apologizes, acknowledging that he's rarely wrong, but that he was in this case.

Three crumbles without Four's support because Eight asks for arguments, which was Four's strong point. Four's willingness to admit his error shows that changing one's mind also requires strength of character. Stubbornness is different than taking a stand.



Three says that the others won't intimidate him and that it will be a hung jury. Eight says that there is nothing the rest of them can do about that. Nine comments that it takes a lot of courage to stand alone, which echoes his earlier admiration for Eight's ability to do so, while showing that he doesn't believe Three is capable of standing alone. Four says that with a hung jury there will be another trial, but, in the meantime, some of the jurors will bring these considerations to the defense lawyers, which will help the accused in the retrial.

Nine echoes his words from early in the play about the courage of standing alone, placing Three in contrast to Eight. Whereas Eight took a stand (a stand he was willing to sacrifice if everyone still disagreed with him during the second vote), Three is being stubborn. His refusal has no reasons behind it other than personal animosity. Eight's was a refusal based on not yet being given the chance to see evidence. Three's is a refusal to see that evidence. Despite



Three surrenders. The other jurors rise and the Foreman goes to the door. The Guard lets all the jurors out except Three and Eight. Eight says to Three that they're waiting on him. Three takes the **switch knife** and walks over to Eight. He looks at Eight and holds the knife, in proper underhanded switchblade style, in the direction of Eight's belly. Eight says firmly, "not guilty." Three hands the knife to Eight, handle first. Three says "not guilty." Three and Eight exit the jury room.

Three's legal surrender precedes a physical showdown with Eight that is based on personal aggression. That this showdown almost mirrors the alleged one between the kid and the kid's father is no coincidence. Yet in this case Three gives up the knife. In this way Three both physically embodies his switched position from guilty to innocent (that the kid murdered his father to the admission that there was a reasonable doubt that he didn't) and also embodies the way that the workings of the jury both exposed differences and strong feelings between jury members and then, as they worked through the evidence, overcame those differences as the jury did its duty.





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