

112 American Literature (11th College Prep) Summer Reading Assignment 2020

DUE DATE: Monday, August 3, 2020 (first day of school)

You will need to obtain a physical copy of Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* in order to complete this assignment and be prepared for American Literature.

Your assignment:

- I. **Read and annotate the book.** Though teachers will **NOT** be grading annotations, they will be beneficial for class assessments, which may include any or all of the following: Socratic seminar, written response, and test. There will be an assessment given within the first three days of school.

People and Place suggestions for annotating:

Avery Jenkins	Joe Sullivan	Robert E. Lee Key
Bill Hooks	Johnny D	Rhonda Morrison
Bryan Stevenson	Karen Kelly	Rosa Parks
Charlie	Marsha Colbey	Stevenson's Mom
Clay Cast	Bridgett Lee	Trina Garnett
Darnell Houston	Michael O'Connor	Tutwiler Prison
Herbert Richardson	Mrs. Jennings	Walter McMillian
Horace Dunkins	Mrs. Williams	
Ian Manuel	Ralph Myers	

II. Journal Writing with *Just Mercy* – worth a 1 weight essay grade

- A. Write a total of **three journal entries** based on the discussion questions provided on the next page. You will address a different question for each of your entries. Please label each journal entry with the question that is addressed in that entry.
- B. Divide your book into three sections. You should have a journal entry from the beginning, middle, and end of the book.
- C. Include **one quotation with lead-in and citation** in your journal entry response. Your citation will look like this (Stevenson 129).
- D. Responses should be in MLA format - **typed** and **double-spaced** in **Times New Roman 12 pt. font. No handwritten responses will be accepted.**
- E. Each response should be a minimum of $\frac{3}{4}$ **page in length** and thoroughly examine the topic of the discussion question.
- F. Save the document. You will be required to upload it to Turnitin.com.
- G. Bring your typed assignment on the first day of class.

Discussion Questions

1. Is there anything about which you think or feel differently as a result of reading *Just Mercy*?
2. Who would you say is the center of this book: Bryan Stevenson or Walter McMillian?
3. Which details of Walter's case were most difficult for you to accept? Was it difficult to believe that this could really happen?
4. What was your reaction to the fact that Walter's case took place in Monroeville? How could the very residents who romanticized Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* stand for (or, worse, contribute to) Walter's trials?
5. In which aspects was Walter's case the ideal choice to use as the focus of the book? Would a case with a less flagrant miscarriage of justice have been a better way to test the author's convictions?
6. Are the cases used as examples more about race or about poverty? In your opinion, is that a worthwhile question to ask?
7. Stevenson laments that "the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty, in too many places, is justice." How do you feel when you read those words?
8. Do you agree that "wealth, not culpability, shapes outcomes" in our justice system?
9. Critics of social justice initiatives complain that too many excuses are being made for those who have done wrong. What relevance might this opening line from *The Great Gatsby* have in the debate over this issue: "whenever you feel like criticizing anyone... just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had"?
10. How do cases such as Herbert Richardson's, the man who set a bomb that killed a young girl, test these convictions?
11. Do you believe as Stevenson does, that we are more than the worst thing we have ever done? What effect, if any, should that belief have on the justice system?
12. One of Stevenson's persistent talking points is that the question is not whether the condemned deserves to die but whether we deserve to kill. How does he explain this? Do you find this compelling?
13. Do you agree that the character of a nation is determined by how it treats the broken, the poor, the oppressed? Is this realistic?
14. In your opinion, is Stevenson against individuals accepting responsibility and/or consequences for their actions? Is there a middle ground?
15. Which other cases were memorable for you? Were you angry? Saddened? Did any moments bring satisfaction?
16. This book is often characterized as a memoir. Does that surprise you? In what ways does it fit that category?
17. What is your opinion of Stevenson as a "character"? Do you feel you know him? Do you understand him?
18. Did you notice the alternating structure of the book in which chapters about Walter's case were followed by chapters on cases which illustrated different issues? What might the thinking behind that have been? Was it effective?
19. What does it mean to be a "stonecatcher"? What are the implications, both positive and negative?
20. Were you satisfied with the amount of time devoted to how the court system deals with mental illness, women, and children? Are you inspired to learn more?
21. Consider the title. What did you take it to mean before you read and/or what does it mean to you now?
22. The title appears specifically in two passages (p. 294 and p. 314). What is the context? Why "just" mercy in each instance?
23. When asked what effect he hoped *Just Mercy* would have on readers, Stevenson replied, "I hope it makes people more thoughtful about our criminal justice system and the need to prioritize fairness over finality, justice over fear and anger. Many of the problems I describe exist because too many of us have been indifferent or disinterested in the poor and most vulnerable among us who are victimized by our system..."

Looking at your own response, did Stevenson achieve his goal? What do we do with ourselves after reading a work such as this?

Rubric *Just Mercy* – 3 Journal Entries _____

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Journal entry includes one piece of quality text
evidence with correct citation _____/24 (8 per entry)

Journal responses are thoughtful and
clearly answer the question – not just summary _____/45 (15 per entry)

Response demonstrates depth of thinking
- approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page in length _____/21 (7 per entry)

Grammar/mechanics, MLA formatting _____/10

Total _____/100

Summer reading assignments must be completed individually and without the use of unauthorized online sources or study aides. Students who commit an infraction of the Honor Code will receive a grade of zero on the assignment, an N in conduct for this semester in 11th Grade American Literature, and an administrative referral.