

Overview:

Twelve Angry Men, by Reginald Rose

Author: Reginald Rose (1920-)

Genre: Screenplays

Date: 1957

Nationality: American

Genre(s): Screenplays

Reginald Rose was born in New York City on December 10, 1920. After graduating from City College he worked at a series of odd jobs, including a receiving clerk, window cleaner, and camp counselor. He then served in the U.S. Army in World War II, completing his tour of duty as first lieutenant. In 1951 Rose sold his first teleplay, *The Bus to Nowhere*, and went on to write numerous television scripts in the 1950s and 1960s, including *Twelve Angry Men*. He later expanded the hour-long drama into a full-length movie, and received an Oscar nomination for co-producing the 1957 film. Known for focusing on current and biting social issues, Rose wrote *Twelve Angry Men* as a close-up examination of the American jury system.

Events in History at the Time of the Screenplay

The Jury System

The system of trial-by-jury began to take its present form in the English world about the time the Normans came to England in 1066. Juries were initially made up of knowledgeable citizens who were likely to be familiar with the facts of the case. The introduction of lawyers in the fourteenth century and the subsequent use of witnesses modified the system until it evolved into its present form. The role of jurors changed as well. In contrast to the jurors of antiquity, who were familiar with the facts of a case, modern jurors are chosen only if they have no personal knowledge of the facts of the case and can therefore be considered unbiased.

The Constitution of the United States embraced the jury system, elaborating on jury trials for criminal cases in the Sixth Amendment, which provides the right to a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury of the state and district in which the alleged crime has been committed. *Twelve Angry Men* takes place in the criminal court of New York State, whose own constitution (Article 1, Section 2 and Article 6, Section 8) mandates trial by jury. In criminal cases in New York, the charge is first considered by a grand jury composed of sixteen to twenty-three members. It hears witnesses against the accused, and if twelve of the jurors believe that there is sufficient evidence to prosecute, an indictment is handed down. The jury for the trial itself is called a petit (or petty) jury on account of its smaller size (twelve members).

The method of selection of jurors has become fairly standardized. In keeping with the desire for untainted jurors, potential candidates are examined by counsel and by the judge to ensure that they are unbiased and have no

special knowledge of the matters in dispute. Once selected, the jury (usually with several alternates) takes an oath to act fairly and without preconceptions. At the trial's conclusion the judge instructs the jury concerning the verdict, as happens at the outset of *Twelve Angry Men*.

## The Golden Age of Television Drama

The decade of the 1950s is generally considered television's golden age. In addition to Reginald Rose, this period produced such well-known writers as Paddy Chayefsky, Robert Alan Arthur, and Rod Serling. One significant controversy within the medium during this era centered around the comparison of filmed versus live-program formats. This debate grew into broader issues, such as New York versus California as production centers (live broadcasts originated primarily from New York), the aesthetic value of different dramatic styles, and disputes over the constraints of commercial censorship. The commonly held perception of the superiority of live television or TV shows over cheap, genre-based thirty-minute telefilms can be explained in part by television's drive to compete against the older industries of radio and movies. It was commonly held that the key technological advantage of television over the motion picture was TV's capacity to convey a performance as it was happening. In this regard, television offered a unique product—a synthesis of the immediacy of live theatrical performance and the visual strategies (primarily close-up shots) of film. As a result, the prominence and prestige accorded to writers of live television drama were often contrasted with the plight of writers working in feature films and filmed television. In 1957 Rod Serling, a prominent writer of live television, compared the prestige associated with it to filmed television: The writer of the filmed television play was never and is not now an identifiable name in terms of the audience. This is in sharp contrast to the New York live television writer who has been granted an identity, importance and respect second only to the legitimate playwright (Serling in Boddy, p. 88).

Although Reginald Rose wrote many films, he began as a writer of live television, and as *Twelve Angry Men* illustrates, he tailored his craft to the particular strengths of the medium. He used narrow, often indoor settings, and he centered his conflicts on small but crucial individual moral choices. In 1950, would-be television playwrights were advised more or less to do just that: [A] good television script must be simple to produce, with sets that are few and inexpensive, and special effects should be avoided in instances where simpler methods would be just as dramatic (Kaufman and Colodzin in Boddy, p. 83). Three years later, another writer cautioned that live TV is limited in scope: that is, it cannot depend upon broad panorama, colossal montages, or the thrill of the hunt or chase to help the limping script (Boddy, p. 84).

## Capital Punishment

Capital punishment, or the imposition of the death penalty by the state, was widely applied in ancient times. From the fall of Rome to the beginnings of the modern era, capital punishment was practiced throughout western Europe. The modern movement for the abolition of capital punishment began in the eighteenth century with the writings of two French philosophers, Charles-Louis Montesquieu and Voltaire, and has been gaining ground since. Nevertheless, before the 1970s, a wide range of capital crimes remained on the books of many locales in the United States, as the following chart illustrates. In the fifty-five jurisdictions examined—the fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, federal civil

jurisdiction, and military jurisdiction a number of offenses were deemed punishable by death.

Traditionally, under English law, death penalties were mandatory; once the defendant was found guilty of a capital offense, the court had no alternative but a death sentence. The jury therefore could avoid delivering a death penalty in a capital punishment case only by acquitting the defendant or by a finding of guilt on a lesser offense. This is the situation in *Twelve Angry Men*. In the United States, discretionary capital punishment laws slowly replaced mandatory death penalties. New York, however, did not make this change until 1963, becoming the fortieth state to do so (Bedau, p. 10). A decade earlier in 1953, when the play was first presented, sixty-two prisoners died by execution in the United States.

Events in the early 1950s called greater attention to both the jury system and the death penalty. This was the era of the Cold War and the attendant panic in America over communism. Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy headed a congressional committee investigating possible subversive elements within the U.S. government, and this scrutiny also came to be focused upon well-known personalities in the entertainment industry and even on ordinary Americans. People were accused seemingly at random of treason, especially if they had or once had ties to any legitimate American socialist or communist organizations. Many people who disagreed with McCarthy's ultra-conservative ideas were brought to trial on charges that could have resulted in executions. One such trial was that of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Accused of passing information about nuclear technology to the Russians, the pair were arrested in 1950 and brought to trial largely on the testimony of Ethel's brother, testimony bartered for by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The husband and wife were convicted of treason and sentenced to death. In 1953 that sentence was carried out, but not before heated arguments arose on both sides. Many protested that the evidence presented was simply not enough to condemn the pair to the electric chair. It was not until 1995 that the federal government revealed previously secret evidence that seemed to justify the actions of the judge and jury.

The McCarthy hearings and notorious cases such as the Rosenberg trial stimulated discussion about a criminal court system whose regulations had evolved through tradition and practice. In 1952 the legal profession chose a blue-ribbon committee to develop a unified legal code to guide participants in trials. Still, at the time of *Twelve Angry Men*, only six of the then forty-eight states had rejected the death penalty allowed by federal law for the crimes of murder, kidnapping, the sale of heroin, and criminal attacks. Forty-two states agreed that death was a reasonable retribution for murder. Left to be determined by individual courts for the most part was reasonable doubt, which, if established, would enable the defendant to avoid the death sentence. In New York, as portrayed in *Twelve Angry Men*, reasonable doubt became very important since it was an escape from a mandatory sentence of death in cases involving murder.

## The Screenplay in Focus

### The Plot

The film version of *Twelve Angry Men* opens in the Court of General Sessions in New York, just as the trial of an impoverished nineteen-year-old boy accused of knifing his father to death has come to an end. The judge gives the twelve jurors their instructions, stressing that the defendant must

be viewed as innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, and reminds them that a guilty verdict in this case must result in the death penalty. Expecting a rapid verdict in what appears to be a conclusive case, the foreman invites an immediate vote on what most believe will be a unanimous guilty verdict. A show of hands reveals eleven guilty votes. The lone holdout is Juror #8. He senses that the beyond a reasonable doubt condition stipulated by the judge has not been met. The others are baffled by his refusal to raise his hand, and not a little irritated. Boy-oh-boy, says Juror #10. There's always one (Rose, *Twelve Angry Men*, p. 176). Grudgingly, they agree to re-examine the evidence. Later, a second vote is taken, and this time there are four votes for acquittal.

The deliberation continues, and as the debate becomes more heated, the character of each man emerges. The foreman is a man who wants no trouble and will go along with the majority rather than risk causing offense. Juror #2 is a meek bank clerk who is not accustomed to making his own decisions. The third juror is a temperamental, impatient man with a streak of sadism (*Twelve Angry Men*, p. 159); Juror #4 is a stockbroker with refined mannerisms and an air of superiority. The fifth juror is a street-wise mechanic whose origins, which he would rather forget, are close to those of the defendant, and Juror #6 is a plodding, dull-witted housepainter. Juror #7 is a restless, callous, and obtuse salesman. Much of the dialog centers around Juror #8, a thoughtful, compassionate, earnest man, an architect, whose only goal is to seek the truth. Juror #9 is an elderly, depressed old man; the tenth juror is an irascible bigot. A first-generation immigrant, Juror #11, speaks only occasionally, and is rarely listened to. The final member, Juror #12, is a snobbish, superficial advertising man.

As the deliberation continues, the architect forces the others to take a closer look at the circumstantial evidence presented by the prosecution. His calm, purposeful arguments gradually sway the views of his fellow jurors, until at last all but one, the stockbroker, agree that the evidence is insufficient. Finally, when it is revealed that this juror's troubles with his own son have interfered with his judgment in the case, he breaks down and changes his vote. The unanimous vote is for acquittal, and the men, still strangers who don't know each other's names, disperse and return to their respective lives.

### The Nonconformist

*Twelve Angry Men* is a story about one juror who refuses to conform to the opinions of those around him. It would be much easier for everyone involved if Juror #8, the architect, simply voted guilty with the others at the start of deliberations. In fact, after the first vote is taken, the others show their impatience with his unwillingness to conform. The architect's refusal to suppress his inner convictions merely to align himself with the group has a curious effect on the others; it sparks a chain reaction in which each man is forced to re-examine the rationale behind his own decision. The story documents the progressive effect the architect's individual strength of character has over the others. Juror #9, the first man to reconsider and change his vote from guilty to not guilty, gives this explanation:

This gentleman (indicating #8) has been standing alone against us. He doesn't say the boy is not guilty. He just isn't sure. Well, it's not easy to stand alone against the ridicule of others, even when there's a worthy cause.

So he gambled for support, and I gave it to him. I respect his motives. The boy on trial is probably guilty. But I want to hear more. (Twelve Angry Men, p. 219)

When the others berate Juror #9 for changing his mind, Juror #11, the European immigrant, comes to his defense: I have always thought that a man was entitled to have unpopular opinions in this country. This is the reason I came here (Twelve Angry Men, p. 217).

The tension presented in Twelve Angry Men between the group and the nonconformist is a revealing microcosm of a larger phenomenon in American society in the 1950s. The pressure to conform to social values and beliefs presented by the mass media, big business, and suburban living was well documented in bestselling books such as David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956). Riesman's thesis was that Americans had become other-directed (controlled and determined by outside influences) rather than inner-directed (remaining true to oneself, as in the case of the architect in the play) while Whyte's work held that the modern man was now concerned more with excelling in an organization than with his own personal excellence. Both books point to a decline in individualism and a corresponding rise in the power of the group that transpired during the decade.

## Sources

The action of Twelve Angry Men takes place almost entirely in a single setting an actual New York State jury room. These production features originated in the restrictions that live television placed on the original teleplay, and ironically they are largely responsible for making Twelve Angry Men a landmark film in its day.

At the outset of his career, in the 1950s, Reginald Rose was a writer passionately committed to protesting social injustice: The things I used to write about all involved violence. Injustices and outrages that I saw bothered me ... and I wanted to fight against them (Rose in Polier, p. 8). Rose's method was to begin with a story centered around a particular issue. Only after that was determined would he populate his fictional landscape with characters. In a 1957 article in the *New York Times*, Rose outlines the process by which he composed Twelve Angry Men. He began by describing the plot and the conditions to which the script had to conform. Then came the characters:

First, of course, there had to be twelve characters, so I was faced at the outset with the following relatively simple problems. How old is each of these men, what in general does he look like, and what does he do for a living? Is he married, unmarried, divorced? Is he rich, poor or middle-class? ... These questions, and many others, had to be asked and answered before I could sit down to write a single word of dialogue. (Rose, *The Trying Talesman*, p. 5)

Later in life, Rose admitted to sacrificing depth of character in exchange for dealing with social issues. In the case of Twelve Angry Men, he wrote both the screenplay and the teleplay on this premise.

## Reception

The critical reaction to the 1957 film version of *Twelve Angry Men* was unanimously positive. A. H. Weiler's *New York Times* review was typical: Reginald Rose's excellent elaboration of his fine television play of 1954 ... is a penetrating, sensitive and sometimes shocking dissection of the hearts and minds of men who obviously are less than gods. It makes for a taut, absorbing drama that reaches far beyond the close confines of its jury room setting (Weiler, p. 24). Eleanor Roosevelt witnessed a private screening of the movie and liked it enormously, writing about it in her newspaper column *My Day*: As a character study, this is a fascinating movie, but more than that, it points up the fact ... of what it means to serve on a jury when a man's life is at stake (Roosevelt, pp. 12829). Both Rose and lead actor Henry Fonda received Oscar nominations for their role as co-producers, and director Sidney Lumet was also nominated for his work.

Financially, however, the movie did not perform well. Released as a conventional booking in large theaters (rather than being distributed only to small art houses, where it might have gained a major following and run for months on the strength of favorable reviews), the film failed to make a profit. Yet the picture continued to be screened for years in civics classes in schools and for business people as a lesson in decision-making. Despite its anachronisms (the all-white, all-male jury), *Twelve Angry Men* continues to appeal to audiences to this day, and it remains Rose's most acclaimed and best-known work.

#### FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Source: Reginald Rose: *Twelve Angry Men*, in *Literature and Its Times: Profiles of 300 Notable Literary Works and the Historical Events that Influenced Them, Volume 4: World War II to the Affluent Fifties (1940-1950s)*, edited by Joyce Moss and George Wilson, Gale Research, 1997.

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Overview:

Twelve Angry Men, by Reginald Rose

Author: Reginald Rose (1920-2002)

Date: 1954

Introduction

Twelve Angry Men, by the American playwright Reginald Rose, was originally written for television, and it was broadcast live on CBS's show Studio One in 1954. The fifty-minute television script can be found in Rose's Six Television Plays, published in 1956 (out of print in 2005). Rose expanded the play for the stage, and a new version was published in 1955 (Dramatic Publishing Company; in print). Two years later, in 1957, Rose wrote the screenplay for a film version, which he coproduced with the actor Henry Fonda. The play has subsequently been updated and revived; for example, in a production at the American Airlines Theater in New York City in 2004.

The play was inspired by Rose's own experience of jury duty on a manslaughter case in New York City. At first, he had been reluctant to serve on a jury, but, he wrote, "the moment I walked into the courtroom . . . and found myself facing a strange man whose fate was suddenly more or less in my hands, my entire attitude changed." Rose was greatly impressed by the gravity of the situation, the somber activity of the court, and the "absolute finality" of the decision that he and his fellow jurors would have to make. He also thought that since no one other than the jurors had any idea of what went on in a jury room, "a play taking place entirely within a jury room might be an exciting and possibly moving experience for an audience" ("Author's Commentary" on Twelve Angry Men in Six Television Plays). The result is a taut, engrossing drama in which eleven jurors believe the defendant in a capital murder trial is guilty, while one juror stands up courageously for what he believes is justice and tries to persuade the others to his way of thinking.

Plot

## Act 1

Twelve Angry Men takes place in a jury room in the late afternoon on a hot summer's day in New York City. After the curtain rises, the judge's voice is heard offstage, giving instructions to the jury. He says that the defendant is being tried for first-degree murder, which carries a mandatory death penalty. The judge adds that if the jury has reasonable doubt about the guilt of the accused, they must acquit him. The verdict must be unanimous.

The jurors, all men, file into the jury room and sit in straight-backed chairs around a long conference table. The weather is hot, and there is no air-conditioning; some of the men are irritable. From the initial chitchat, it is clear that most members of the jury regard the man as guilty. Jurors Seven and Ten ridicule the defendant's story. Apparently, a young man has stabbed his father to death with a knife. He admits that he bought a knife that night but claims that he lost it.

The jury takes a vote. Eleven jurors vote guilty, and one juror, Juror Eight, votes not guilty. Jurors Three, Seven, and Twelve criticize him, but Juror Eight says that he does not know whether the man is guilty or not but that it is not easy for him to send a boy to his death without discussing it first. After some argument, they agree to discuss the facts of the case. Juror Three reviews what they know. An old man who lives underneath the room where the murder took place heard loud noises just after midnight. He heard the son yell at the father that he was going to kill him. Then he heard a body falling and moments later, saw the boy running out of the house. Juror Four says the boy's story is flimsy. He said that he was at the movies at the time of the murder, but no one remembers seeing him there. Also, a woman living opposite looked out of her window and saw the murder through the windows of a passing elevated train. During the trial, it was verified that this was possible. Further facts emerge: the father regularly beat his son, and the son had been arrested for car theft, mugging, and knife fighting. He had been sent to reform school for knifing someone.

Juror Eight insists that, during the trial, too many questions were left unasked. He asks for the murder weapon to be brought in and says that it is possible that someone else stabbed the boy's father with a similar knife. Several jurors insist the knife is a very unusual one, but then Juror Eight produces from his pocket a switchblade that is exactly the same. He says that it is possible the boy is telling the truth. The other jurors scoff at this, but Juror Eight calls for another vote, a secret one this time. He says that he will abstain. When the votes are counted, there are ten guilty votes and one not guilty.

## Act 2

Juror Three is angry with Juror Five because he thinks that Juror Five is the one who changed his vote. It transpires that the not-guilty vote was cast by Juror Nine. This juror says that he wants to hear more discussion of the case, even though there is still a strong feeling among the other jurors that the defendant is guilty. Jurors Three and Twelve start to play a game of tic-tac-toe to pass the time, but Juror Eight angrily snatches the piece of paper away, saying that jury deliberations are not a game. Pressured by Juror Eight, the jury agrees that it would take about ten seconds for the train to pass by the apartment. Juror Eight also establishes



that the train is noisy, so the old man could not have heard the boy yell that he was going to kill his father, as the old man testified. Juror Nine suggests that the old man may have convinced himself that he heard the words because he has never had any recognition from anyone and has a strong need for attention. Juror Three responds to this with hostility, but Juror Eight argues additionally that even if the boy had said he was going to kill his father, that does not mean he intended to do so, since people often use that or similar phrases without meaning them. Convinced by these arguments, Juror Five changes his vote to not guilty, making the vote nine to three.

Juror Eight then questions the old man's testimony that he took only fifteen seconds to get downstairs, open the front door, and see the boy fleeing. He says that bearing in mind that the man cannot walk well, it probably took longer. Using a diagram of the apartment, Juror Eight acts out the old man's steps and is timed at thirty-nine seconds. He says that the old man must have heard, rather than seen, someone racing down the stairs and assumed it was the boy. An argument erupts between Jurors Three and Eight, as Juror Three insists the boy is guilty and must be executed. Juror Eight accuses him of being a sadist. Juror Three lunges at him, screaming that he will kill him. Juror Eight replies softly, suggesting that perhaps Juror Three does not really mean what he is saying.

### Act 3

The jurors take another vote, this time an open one, which is evenly split, six to six. Jurors Two, Six, and Eleven have switched their votes, to the annoyance of Jurors Three and Ten. The possibility of being a hung jury is brought up, but Juror Eight refuses to accept the possibility. They take a vote on that, too. Six jurors vote in favor of declaring themselves a hung jury; six vote against. Juror Four changes his vote, so it is seven to five against declaring a hung jury. Juror Four then argues persuasively for a guilty verdict, based on the evidence. He raises the possibility that although the old man may have taken longer to get to the door than he testified, the murderer might also have taken longer to escape. Reenacting the actions of the murderer, the jurors time it at twenty-nine and a half seconds. This suggests that the old man's testimony that he saw the boy fleeing may be correct after all. As a result, three jurors change their votes back, leaving the tally at nine to three in favor of guilt.

Juror Two raises a question about the fact that the fatal wound was caused by a downward thrust of the knife. How could that be, since the son is six inches shorter than his father, which would make such an action very awkward? Juror Three demonstrates on Juror Eight how it could be done, crouching down to approximate the boy's height and then raising the knife and making a downward stabbing motion. But Juror Five, who has witnessed knife fights, says that anyone using a switchblade would use it underhand, stabbing upward, thus making it unlikely that the boy, who was an experienced knife fighter, could have caused the fatal wound. Another vote is taken, and it is nine to three in favor of acquittal. Juror Ten goes off on a prejudiced rant about how all people from the slums are liars and violent and have no respect for human life. Disgusted with his views, most of the other jurors get up and walk to the window, where they turn their backs on Juror Ten.

Juror Four still insists that the boy is guilty. He says the most important testimony is that of the woman who says she saw the murder. She was in

bed, unable to sleep, when she looked out the window and saw the boy stab his father. Juror Eight reminds them that the woman wears glasses, but she would not wear them in bed and would not have had time to put them on to see what she claims to have seen. He contends that she could have seen only a blur. At this, Jurors Four and Ten change their votes to not guilty, leaving the tally at eleven to one. Only Juror Three insists on a guilty verdict, but when he sees that he stands alone and cannot change anyone else's opinion, he begrudgingly votes not guilty. The jury has reached a unanimous decision, and the defendant is acquitted.

## Characters

**Foreman :** The foreman is described in the author's notes to the play as "a small, petty man who is impressed with the authority he has." The foreman tries to run the meeting in an orderly fashion, but in the film he is too sensitive and sulks when his attempt to stick to the way they had agreed to proceed is questioned. His contribution to the deliberations comes when they are discussing how long the killer would have taken to get downstairs. The foreman points out that since the killer wiped his fingerprints off the knife, he would also have done so off the doorknob, which would have taken some time. He votes guilty several times, but in act 3 he switches his vote, along with two others, to make the total nine to three for acquittal.

**Juror Two :** Juror Two is a quiet, meek figure who finds it difficult to maintain an independent opinion. In the 1957 film, he is a bank clerk. Juror Two does, however, make one useful contribution to the jury deliberations. He mentions that it seems awkward that the defendant, who was six inches shorter than his father, would stab him with a downward motion, as the fatal wound indicates. Although this is not a conclusive point, it does jog Juror Five's memory of how a switchblade is used and so helps to induce doubt in the minds of a number of jurors. Juror Two changes his vote to not guilty at the beginning of act 3, along with Jurors Eleven and Six.

**Juror Three :** Juror Three is a forceful, intolerant man who is also a bully. In the 1957 film, he runs a messenger service called Beck and Call. He believes that there is no point in discussing the case, since the defendant's guilt is plain, and he is quick to insult and browbeat anyone who suggests otherwise. At one point, Juror Three describes how he fell out with his son. He raised his son to be tough, but when the boy was fifteen, he hit his father in the face, and Juror Three has not seen his son for three years. He condemns his son as ungrateful.

As the play develops, it becomes clear that Juror Three is the principal antagonist of Juror Eight. This is brought out visually when Juror Three demonstrates on Juror Eight how he would use a knife to stab a taller man. His animosity to Juror Eight comes out in the aggressive way he makes the demonstration, which shocks some of the jurors. Also, when Juror Eight calls him a sadist, Juror Three is incensed and threatens to kill him.

Juror Three is the last to hold out for a guilty verdict. For a few moments after it becomes apparent that he stands alone, he sticks to his guns, saying there will be a hung jury, but he finally gives in to the pressure and votes not guilty. In the film, he pulls out his wallet to produce some facts of the case--perhaps notes he has made--and a photograph of himself

with his son falls out. He stares at it for a few moments and then tears it up and begins to sob. He recognizes that his desire to convict and punish the defendant is bound up with his feelings of anger and betrayal in regard to his own son.

**Juror Four :** Juror Four is described in the author's notes as seeming to be "a man of wealth and position, and a practiced speaker who presents himself well at all times." In the 1957 film, he is a stockbroker, a well-dressed man in an expensive suit who, unlike the others, does not remove his jacket and shows no signs of distress in the heat. He is an arch rationalist who insists that the jury should avoid emotional arguments in deciding the case. He has a good grasp of the facts and an excellent memory, and he presents the case for guilt as well as it can be done. He is extremely skeptical of the defendant's story that he was at the movies on the night of the murder. However, his pride in his memory is shaken when, under questioning from Juror Eight, he discovers that he cannot accurately recall the title of one of the movies he saw only a few days ago, nor can he remember the names of the actors. (This incident is not in the play, but it appears in the film.) However, he still believes strongly in the defendant's guilt and is the last juror but one to change his vote. This occurs when it is demonstrated that the piece of evidence on which he places greatest value--the woman's eyewitness testimony that she saw the murder take place--is undermined. He then admits that he has a reasonable doubt.

**Juror Five :** Juror Five is described in the author's notes as "a naive, very frightened young man who takes his obligations in this case very seriously but who finds it difficult to speak up when his elders have the floor." When, at the beginning, jurors are asked to speak in turn, Juror Five declines the opportunity. Later, he protests when Jurors Four and Ten speak disparagingly of kids from slum backgrounds, saying that he has lived in a slum all his life. Juror Five's main contribution is in pointing out that an experienced knife fighter would use a switchblade underhand, stabbing upward rather than down. He knows this because he has witnessed such fights. Juror Five is the second juror to switch his vote to not guilty. He acquires a reasonable doubt when it is shown that, because of the noise from the train, the old man could not have heard the boy yell that he would kill his father.

**Juror Six :** Juror Six is a housepainter, a man who is used to working with his hands rather than analyzing with his brain. He is more of a listener than a talker. In the film version, he suggests early in the debate that the defendant had a motive to kill his father, because there was testimony in the trial about an argument between father and son earlier in the evening. But Juror Eight dismisses this as a possible motive. Juror Six stands up for Juror Nine when Juror Three speaks rudely to him, threatening to strike Juror Three if he says anything like that again. Juror Six also speaks up for himself when he changes his vote, succinctly explaining why he did so. In the film version, he talks to Juror Eight in the washroom, asking him how he would feel if he succeeded in getting the defendant acquitted but later found out that he was guilty.

**Juror Seven :** Juror Seven is a salesman. He assumes that the defendant is guilty and has no interest in discussing it. His only concern is that the deliberations should be over quickly, so that he does not miss the Broadway show he has tickets for. (In the film version, he has tickets for a baseball game.) At no time does he make any serious contribution to the debate, other than to point out that the defendant has a record

of arrests. In the film, he is a baseball fan and uses baseball allusions in almost everything he says. At one point, he gets into an argument with Juror Eleven about why Juror Eleven changed his vote, and he makes some prejudiced remarks about immigrants. He favors declaring a hung jury, because that will mean he will get out of the jury room quickly. Eventually, he changes his vote to not guilty, for the same reason. In the film version, Juror Eleven harshly rebukes him for caring only about ending the proceedings as quickly as possible, rather than whether the man is guilty or not.

**Juror Eight :** Juror Eight is a quiet, thoughtful man whose main concern is that justice should be done. In the film, he is an architect. Although he is usually gentle in his manner, he is also prepared to be assertive in the search for truth. He is the only juror who, in the initial ballot, votes not guilty. He does not argue that the man is innocent but says that he cannot condemn a man to death without discussing the case first. As he probes the evidence, he manages to cast reasonable doubt on many aspects of the testimony given at the trial. He is resolute in suggesting that although, on its face, the evidence may suggest guilt, it is possible that there are other explanations for what happened that night. Juror Eight is a natural leader, and one by one he persuades the other jurors to accept his arguments. A telling moment comes when he produces a knife from his pocket that is exactly the same as the murder weapon; when he says that he bought it cheaply in the neighborhood, he disproves the jury's belief up to that point that the knife is a very unusual one.

Juror Eight remains calm throughout the deliberations. The only times (in the film version) that he becomes heated is when he stops the game of tic-tac-toe that Jurors Ten and Twelve have started and when he calls Juror Three a sadist. The latter incident serves his purpose, however, because it goads Juror Three into saying that he will kill Juror Eight, thus proving Juror Eight's earlier point that when such expressions are used, they are not always meant literally.

**Juror Nine :** Juror Nine is an old man. In the author's notes, he is described as "long since defeated by life, and now merely waiting to die." In the film version, however, he is given more strength and dignity, and other jurors insist that he be heard. It is Juror Nine (in both play and film) who is the first to switch his vote to not guilty, saying that he wants a fuller discussion of the case, as Juror Eight has requested. It is Juror Nine who offers an explanation of why the old man might have lied about hearing the boy yell that he was going to kill his father. Juror Nine's explanation is that, because the old man has led an insignificant life and no one has ever taken any notice of him, this is his one chance for recognition. Juror Nine is also extremely observant, and the film version amplifies his role in the final discussion, when he is the one to point out that the female witness at the trial, in an effort to look younger, omitted to wear the glasses that she habitually wore, as shown by the marks on either side of her nose. This is the key point that results in the discrediting of the woman's testimony.

**Juror Ten :** Juror Ten is described in the author's notes as "an angry, bitter man--a man who antagonizes almost at sight. He is also a bigot." He is automatically prejudiced against anyone who comes from a slum. He believes strongly that the defendant is guilty, argues the case forcefully, and is one of the last three to hold out for a guilty verdict. But he loses credibility with the other jurors when he makes a long speech near the

end of the play that reveals his bigotry in full. He insists that people from slums are drunks and liars who fight all the time. The other jurors repudiate him, and Juror Four tells him not to say another word; he does not, other than to finally admit that there is a reasonable doubt in the case.

**Juror Eleven :** Juror Eleven is an immigrant from Europe, a refugee from persecution. He is possibly Jewish, although this is not stated explicitly. In the film, he is a watchmaker. Juror Eleven feels fortunate to be living in a country known for its democracy, and he has great respect for the American judicial system. He takes his responsibility as a juror very seriously. He is one of three jurors who change their minds, to make the vote split six to six. He further expresses reasonable doubt about the old man's ability to recognize the son in a dimly lit tenement building. In the author's notes, he is described as "ashamed, humble, almost subservient to the people around him," but in the film his character is strengthened. He rebukes Juror Seven for not taking the trial more seriously, and he is prepared to stand up for what he believes. Also in the film version, he questions whether the son would have returned to his father's house at three o'clock in the morning if he had been the murderer.

**Juror Twelve :** Juror Twelve works for an advertising agency. He is clever, but as the author's notes point out, he "thinks of human beings in terms of percentages, graphs and polls, and has no real understanding of people." When Juror Three presses him, near the end of the play, to explain his not-guilty vote, he finds it very hard to do so, since he does not, in fact, have strong opinions one way or the other. He is reduced to mumbling about the complexity of the evidence.

Source: "Twelve Angry Men," in *Drama for Students*, Vol. 23, Thomson Gale, 2006.