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English 10 Mrs. Filor

*Twelve Angry Men* Act I Reading Guide

1. What is the setting of the play? A jury room in a large Eastern city in the 1950’s
2. Who are the characters? 12 white, male jurors
3. What is the conflict? What type of conflict is it? The men have to make a decision on the young man’s guilt so it is a man versus self conflict.
4. How is the young man on trial characterized? He is characterized as a 19 year old who is not white and was raised in a slum. His mother died when he was nine; his father beat him. He has been in reform school. He stole a car. He was arrested for knife-fighting; he stabbed someone in the arm.
5. Which three testimonies are the men basing their decision on? Who testified and what did these people say?

* The old man who lives downstairs at 12:10 on the night of the murder heard the young man shout, “I’m gonna kill you,” then heard a body hit the floor, and then ran to the door to see the young man running down the stairs.
* The woman across the tracks whose window is opposite the murdered man’s saw the murder occur through the windows of a passing el train.
* The neighbors across the hall heard the young man and his father argue at 8:00 PM, heard the father hit his son twice, and then saw the son leave.

1. What evidence is there to help determine whether the young man committed the crime? The young man says when he left at 8:00, he bought a knife for a friend, which he then lost, and went to the movies, but he can’t remember the names of the movies he saw. The knife he bought was similar to the knife found in the murdered man, although according to Juror #8, who bought a knife like it, it is not as unique as the prosecution made it out to be.
2. How does the conflict of the play shift by the end of the Act? The men start fighting with each other about their opinion on the young man’s guilt. It shifts to a man versus man conflict.
3. What are the thematic undertones at the end of Act I? What does Reginald Rose seem to be saying about justice? He seems to be showing that justice can only be decided after looking at all the facts closely and discussing them.
4. If you were a juror, how would you vote at the end of Act I? Guilty or not guilty?