

ENGLISH: *TWELVE ANGRY MEN*

Rose's play vindicates, rather than destroys, the audience's belief in the judicial system as a means of securing justice. To what extent do you agree?

Twelve Angry Men by Reginald Rose provides a confronting portrayal of a 1950's jury, in its pursuit of justice over the killing of a man. The play challenges the audience to see the flaws in the judicial system, such as man's fallibility, but also recognise the strength of this democratic process. This process has certain safeguards, such as collective consensus and reasonable doubt that in an ideal society lead to justice. However, Rose's jurors show that an ideal system is coloured by individual's views and values. Despite such flaws, the playwright indicates that through discussion and debate, a just outcome can be found.

The strength of judiciary system lies in certain safeguards that prevent an unjust decision from being made. Rose places a particular emphasis on the discovery of reasonable doubt. As the play was written during the McCarthy era, many individuals were being persecuted unjustly thus democratic values would have been held in high regard by Rose's audience. The judge at the beginning of the play states that if members of the jury have 'reasonable doubt' a 'verdict of not guilty' must be given. In an ideal jury system, decisions would be founded on fact and every member would be entirely impartial. However in twelve angry men many of the jury members decision to vote 'guilty' is not based on facts, but rather personal prejudices. Were it not for the presence of juror number 8, a man of reason, the boy would have been convicted as guilty. Although juror 8 'doesn't know the truth' he reminds the jurors that '[they] cannot declare a man guilty unless it's sure'. It is made evident that not having 'a monopoly on the truth' has been a problem that 'has been tormenting [juror 8]' and many others as well. But is it not the uncovering of the truth, that is the role of the jury, but rather ensuring that a just outcome is made. Rose indicates to his audience that justice is served in Twelve Angry Men through the discovery of reasonable doubt and a verdict of 'not guilty' given.

The flawed jurors throughout Twelve Angry Men show to the audience how man's shortcoming can have a dangerous influence over the decisions made to secure justice. Rose uses Juror 10, an abhorrently racist individual, and Juror 3, a man driven by personal objectives, to demonstrate how 'prejudice obscures the truth'. By having such men in the jury, it makes the reader question whether or not the jury system is truly governed by 'impartial' men. Juror 10 is describes as 'dangerous' by a fellow juror, due to his strong and somewhat perverse views of 'foreigners'. At the beginning of the play his racist values are made clear when he labels the young boys race 'born liars'. Instead of listening to the discussion, juror 10 decides to base his opinion on his own thoughts rather than the case at hand. His final input to jury deliberation exhibits his powerful racism by referring to 'those people' as 'wild animals' intent on 'breeding us out of existence'. Juror 3 on the other hand feels like he is the boy's 'executioner' because of personal troubles the man has with his own son. In a personal vendetta, juror 3 is the final man to change his vote to not guilty and throughout the play intentionally acts as an antagonist to anyone who defends the boy. Both these jurors have bullying tendencies making less confident and timid jurors such as juror 2 and 5, easy influenced by their antics. Through such behaviour towards other jurors and high levels of self-absorbency, Rose demonstrates how certain individuals have the capability to negatively affect the outcome of court case.

Through discussion and debate, the audience is given an understanding of how a disbanded jury can unite to come to unanimous decision. At the beginning of the play, after the jurors are then locked into the jury room, the audience is made to understand the seriousness of the issue when the overhead of the judge is heard. In his speech, he reminds the jurors that 'one man is already dead, and the life of another is at stake'. The jury room is described as 'drab, badly in need of a fresh coat of paint', and situated in the middle is a 'scarred table'. Through these stage directions it is made clear that many past battles have been fought there pre-empting the debate which is about to occur. Immediately after a vote is called for, juror 8 'stands alone against the ridicule' of the other

11 jurors, who all pass a verdict of guilty, by voting not guilty. Although the 11 jurors all shared the same opinion that the boy is guilty, they were not unified but prone to conflict. The 8th juror's resilient behaviour continues right throughout the play, as he gradually changes the minds of the other jurors. Juror 8's architectural characteristics are evident, as he deconstructs the evidence and prejudice that was present at the beginning of the play. Rose demonstrates through juror 8, how rationality and objectivity is pivotal in the success of the verdict, particularly when against adversaries beset with prejudice. The juror's unity by the end of the play is seen when all jurors turn their backs on the 10th juror during his rant about 'the slum dwellers'. This is in distinct contrast to at the beginning of the play when the jurors were wandered incoherently around the room. Rose's audience would have understood the value of collective consensus and unanimity in decision making, after many individuals were persecuted due to the beliefs of certain individuals, not society as a whole.

Throughout *Twelve Angry Men*, Rose critically examines the workings of the judicial system. He describes the jury system as idealistic and susceptible to the flaws that are present in men. Through this Rose demonstrates the importance of objectivity and the dissection of information. Nevertheless, Rose places the judicial system in a positive light by demonstrating how justice can prevail despite the adversaries that it faces