

ENGLISH: *TWELVE ANGRY MEN*

“Twelve Angry Men is ultimately a negative play. In what ways is this true?”

Reginald Rose’s play, *Twelve Angry Men*, is a well written play about jurors in a homicide trial. *Twelve Angry Men* is ultimately seen as a negative play due to the juror’s incapacibilities; Juror’s slowly manages to convince the others that the case is not as obviously clear as it seemed in court, and there are more things to think about than the ‘facts’ that are first given. However there are some elements that give some hope about the justice system.

One optimistic aspect of the legal system is that juror 8 is determined to see the boy live. He sympathises with the boy, and argues with his fellow jurors to ensure they see his side too; and not just accuse him of things that may or may not be the actual truth. “Well, there were eleven votes for guilty. It’s not easy to raise my hand and send a boy off to die without talking about it first.” He reiterates many times during the course of the play. Ultimately, without juror 8, the boy would definitely be convicted guilty, and the trial would therefore be over.

Juror 8 also uses a lot of effective strategies to persuade the other jurors. For example, he finds substantial faults in the evidence that was given. Firstly there was a lady who stated that she ‘saw’ the crime being committed, out of the last two windows of the passing train, after just getting out of bed, likely without her glasses on. Combined, the jurors proved this to be almost impossible due to the fact that it takes 10 seconds for a train to pass the point of where she was. “I’m gonna kill you” was a phrase heard, just before the boy and his now deceased father had had an argument. But having said that; there was no clue as to what the argument was specifically about, therefore no real generalisations could be made. The old man who also apparently heard the argument said to have ‘ran away’, but when coming into the courtroom to testify, he needed help walking, as he was a frail 75 year old man. Then the jurors had their suspicions of the old man, making claims of hearing the violence as a result of his life of being a ‘no one’, not recognized, and wanting to be needed. All this aside, there was still no 100% guarantee that the boy was innocent or guilty of the crime; as there were so many gaps in both the defense and evidence. So what do they do?

The final example where Rose shows some optimism is that, in the end the boy is found not guilty. After the jurors spent hours with the debate, juror 8 manages to convince the other 11 jurors that the boy deserves to live. “Let the boy live” was the conclusion the whole jury came to, after hours of back and fourth arguments in the room. Hours of juror 8 examining details, very carefully, respecting others views’, but also rebutting them too; never saying the word ‘innocent’ but however staying with a ‘what if’ verdict. He refused to let the verdict lie as ‘guilty’, and as a result, the boy die, purely because everyone ‘thought’ he was guilty of a crime, that didn’t have enough supportive evidence.

The major positivity that was brought to the court was juror’s 8 determination of seeing the boy live; and eventually that positivity paid off, after finding copious reasons for doubts in the stories told by alleged witnesses.

Despite these reasons for optimism, Rose is ultimately pessimistic about the legal system. The jurors consist of a mixture of high and low class citizens of all different lifestyles, to ensure there were no biased opinions in regards to the verdict of the trial; however that is not always the case. Juror number 10 is evidently prejudiced against classes lower than him, and allows his opinion to instantly convict the boy as guilty; “slums are breeding grounds for criminals” he uses as his evidence to prove to the other jurors that he is guilty, and deserves no other opinion. “Children from slum backgrounds are potential menaces to society.” he said when he attempts to reiterate his point of view that the 16 year old boy convicted of violently murdering his father, is in fact guilty.

Some jurors also don’t seem very interested in the trial at all, not wanting to talk and dig further into the situation; which could easily be the difference of a not guilty or a guilty verdict.

For example, juror 7, the salesman, and baseball fan seems uninterested throughout the whole play, as a result of having tickets to a baseball game that he would rather attend as opposed to sort out a homicide case. "What kind of a man are you? You have sat here and voted "guilty" with everyone else because there are some baseball tickets burning a hole in your pocket? And now you've changed your vote because you say you're sick of all the talking here?" is juror 11's attitude towards 7; when he had, had enough of the constant back and forth arguments about whether the teenage boy was guilty or not.

Not only were the jurors' unreliable throughout the case, there are also jurors who are timid and weak. Such as juror 2, the bank clerk, who is a meek, hesitant man. He seemed like he couldn't maintain any opinions of his own, and was easily swayed and usually adopts the opinion of the last person to whom he has spoken. As well as juror 5, the young nurse who is a naive frightened boy, who finds it hard to speak up, after his elders have done so first. Not to mention, the boy's defense wasn't that well thought through either, nor was his lawyer that helpful.

Juror 8 tells us, "Maybe. It's also possible for a lawyer to be just plain stupid, isn't it? I mean it's possible". The boy's life is at stake, but even his defense lawyer is not doing much to save him. Juror Four says the boy's story is "flimsy". "He claimed he was at the movies during the time of the killing, and yet an hour later, he couldn't remember what films he saw, or who played in them". His defense was then 'emotional trauma', but the jury wouldn't have a bar of that. "No one saw him going in or out of the theatre" was another statement against the boy's defense. Having a lady 'witness the crime' was the main reason for his plea of not guilty, to be automatically overlooked by majority of the jury without any thought. Instead they instantly went with her apparent sighting, and completely disregarded the 1 year old boy's statement. They took the apparent sightings from supposed witnesses, and the evidence, which was shaky itself; to produce a debatable verdict; as they did not want to discuss or test it, however just accept it blindly.

Ultimately, Twelve Angry Men is a negative play. The juror's had the idea in their head that the boy was guilty, and wouldn't have given it another thought if it wasn't for juror 8 who manipulated and brought a dramatic emphasis of evidence into the courtroom. Most of the other jurors' (3, 7, 10 and 12) personalities were nothing but negative, aggressive, ignorant and they were ready to condemn the boy in the first minute of walking into the juror's room, without further examining the evidence any more than they had to. Even though they get the not guilty verdict, you get left with the possibility that the boy got away with murder and justice has not been done.