

Just Mercy

Adapted for Young Adults

*A TRUE STORY OF
THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE*

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Name _____

Introduction: Higher Ground

Read each of these quotes from the introduction and write a response. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

“Each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done”

“The opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice”

“The true measure of character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated and the condemned.”

“We are all implicated when we allow other people to be mistreated.”

Chapter 1: Mockingbird Players

Describe the following people:

1. Walter McMillian
2. Karen Kelly
3. Ronda Morrison
4. Vickie Pittman
5. Ralph Myers
6. Tom Tate
7. How is Walter's story similar to the one in *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
8. Why was Walter able to enjoy an independence that many African-Americans did not?
9. Where did the word *miscegenation* come from? What does it mean?

Chapter 2: Stand

1. What did the 1970s Attica prison riots do?

2. Describe “Sweatbox”

3. Describe “Hitching posts”

4. What happened to Lourida Ruffin?

5. Stevenson wished he had been more assertive with the police while they were illegally searching his car. Do you think that would have been effective? How would you recommend someone respond in a similar situation?

6. What does it mean to “beat the drum for justice”?

7. How did the senior citizen attending Stevenson’s church lecture earn his “medals of honor”?

Chapter 3: Trials and Tribulations

1. Why did they initially arrest Walter McMillan?
2. Who is Bill Hooks and what does he have to do with Walter McMillan?
3. What was Walter doing the day of the murder?
4. Describe death row in Alabama.
5. Who was John Evans?
6. What happened to Ralph Myers on death row?
7. What was the ruling in *Strauder v. West Virginia*?
8. What does it mean to change venue?
9. What percentage of Baldwin County was African American?
10. What did the deputy say to Walter when he asked him to loosen the chains?

Chapter 4: The Old Rugged Cross

1. What did Bryan and Eva name their non-profit law center?
2. How many people were executed in Alabama from 1975-1988?
3. Why did prisoners dislike attorney David Bagwell?
4. Why was Michael Lindsey's case unusual?
5. What did Bryan reflect on the last time he saw Herbert?
6. What do you predict will happen to Walter?

Chapter 5: Homeland

1. What always followed when the family mentioned Jackie?
2. What is Walter's nickname?
3. A client's life often depends on his lawyer's _____ to create a _____ that puts in context and explains his _____ decisions or _____ behavior.
4. Why is it important for a lawyer to talk to his clients?
5. What information did Darnell Houston have for Bryan about Walter's case?
6. What happened to Darnell Houston after he spoke with Bryan?
7. What happened with the charges against Darnell?

Chapter 6: Surely Doomed

1. What crime did Charlie commit?
2. What happened to Charlie's mother?
3. Why did Bryan believe they charged Charlie as an adult?
4. Describe George.
5. How did Charlie act when Bryan first talked to him?
6. Who were the Jennings? What did they do?
7. The title of this chapter is "Surely Doomed." Where did Stevenson get this from?
8. Is there ever a time when a child should be charged as an adult for a crime? Is there a particular age that is a "cut off"? Explain your reasoning in detail.
9. Should a person's past be considered when they commit a crime? Explain in your answer in detail. (Write on the back)

Chapter 7: Justice Denied

1. What is across the street from the Alabama Judicial Building?
2. Who is Michael O'Connor?
3. What did Sheriff Tate give Bill Hooks for testifying?
4. What new information did Bryan get about Walter's truck?
5. What did Karen Kelly say about Walter?
6. Who are Mozelle and Onzelle?
7. What did the Supreme Court case *McCleskey v. Kemp* show?
8. What is a Rule 32 Petition?
9. *Payne v. Tennessee* upheld that prosecutors can present evidence about the character of the *victim* in a criminal trial. What are your feelings on this? Explain your answer in detail.

Chapter 8: All God's Children

1. What crime did Trina commit?
2. Trina is one of nearly _____ people in Pennsylvania who have been condemned to _____ without parole for _____ they were accused of committing when they were between the ages of _____ and _____.
3. It is the _____ population of _____ offenders condemned to _____ in prison in any single _____ in the world.
4. What crime did Ian commit?
5. Who is Debbie Baigre? What is her relationship with Ian now?
6. How long did Ian spend uninterrupted in solitary confinement?
7. Florida had the _____ population in the world of _____ condemned to die in prison for _____.
8. Why did Antonio leave Las Vegas and come back to Los Angeles?
9. What crime did Antonio commit?
10. At fourteen, Antonio became the _____ person in the United States _____ to die in prison for a _____ in which no one was _____.
11. What is a “superpredator”?
12. What did Ian want from Bryan?

Chapter 9: I'm Here

(PART ONE)

1. Who is Don Valeska?
2. How long did the judge allow for the Rule 32 hearing?
3. Why did Bryan always dress conservatively for court?
4. Who was in the courtroom when Bryan showed up?
5. Describe how Ralph Myers' testimony went.
6. What did Ikner testify about Pearson? What happened to Ikner's job?
7. What happened to Walter's supporters on the second day of trial?
8. Describe what happened to Mrs. Williams when she came into the courtroom.

Chapter 10: Mitigation

1. What did Dorothea Dix and Reverend Louis Dwight do? When did they do it?
2. Today, over _____ of prison and jail inmates in the United States have a diagnosed mental illness.
3. Why did EJI sue Angola Prison? Why was what they were doing a problem?
4. What did the correctional officer do when Bryan visited Avery Jenkins in prison the first time?
5. What did Avery Jenkins always ask for? Who finally gave it to him?
6. Describe Avery Jenkins crime and his background.
7. What did the correctional officer say to Bryan when he visited Avery after the trial?
8. What ended up happening to Avery Jenkins?

Chapter 11: I'll Fly Away

1. What happened to Robert Robinson and Robert Vance? What were their jobs?
2. What is exculpatory evidence?
3. What did local newspapers claim about Walter?
4. What TV show covered Walter's case?
5. What did the new investigators, Tom Taylor and Greg Cole, discover?
6. What did Bill Hooks say about Bryan?
7. Who did they suspect of actually killing Ronda Morrison?
8. How long did authorities want to keep Walter in jail?
9. Where does Walter's wife want him to go? Why?
10. What did the signs at the courthouse say?
11. What personal materials of Walter's did they collect from the jail?
12. What did Walter say when he left court?

Chapter 12: Mother, Mother

1. What was Marsha Colbey arrested for?
2. Between 1990 and 2005, a new _____ opened up in the United States every _____.
3. What is the “prison industrial complex”?
4. Most incarcerated women-----nearly_____-----are in prison for _____, low-level _____ crimes or _____ crimes.
5. Why are most women on death row?
6. What legislation did Congress pass in 1996?
7. What happened to Marsha Colbey?

Chapter 13: Recovery

1. The Death Penalty Information Center reported that Walter was the _____ person to be _____ since _____.
2. Where did Walter live when he got out of prison?
3. How many states offer compensation to the wrongly imprisoned?
4. What happened to Walter after he started his logging business again?
5. What award did EJI win?
6. What did Walter do during the interview that surprised Bryan?

Chapter 14: Cruel and Unusual

1. What crime was Joe convicted of committing?
2. What crime did Joe admit to doing?
3. What was Joe's sentence?
4. How does Bryan use science to explain why children shouldn't be prosecuted as adults?
5. The 8th Amendment protects against cruel and unusual punishment. Is a life-without-parole sentence cruel and unusual? Is the death penalty? Explain.
6. What could be done to make prisons safer and more humane? What reforms would you put in place?

Chapter 15: Broken

1. What did Walter get diagnosed with?
2. Why wouldn't some of the facilities accept Walter?
3. Where does Walter think he is while he is in the nursing home?
4. Which 6 states no longer have the death penalty?
5. What crime did Jimmy Dill commit?
6. What story did Bryan remember from his childhood?
7. Why did Bryan want to quit?
8. What did he realize about himself that made him stay?
9. "The power of just mercy is that it belongs to the undeserving"
10. (On the back of this paper or on your own paper) Write a 5 paragraph essay about the theme of "broken" from this chapter, specifically, the points that Bryan makes on page 239. Do you agree or disagree? Use personal examples or examples from the book.

Chapter 16: The Stonecatcher's Song of Sorrow

1. What happened on May 17, 2010?
2. What happened in June 2012?
3. Why does referring to 9/11 as the first act of domestic terror upset some older African-Americans?
4. What is convict leasing?
5. What was Angola before it was a prison?
6. Robert Caston was the first person to do what?
7. What do you think the lady and Bryan mean that someone is a "stonecatcher"?