

**12th Grade Summer reading**  
***Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson**

All seniors are to have read *Just Mercy* by the first day of school. Each student will submit handwritten notes to the study guide questions below with their religion teacher on the first day of school in the fall. (The book will be discussed and addressed in varying ways throughout the semester in your Religion, Social Studies, and English classes)

Answer each of the following questions with several sentences.

**Chapter 1**

- 1) In what ways 'Alabama's economic policies disadvantage the state's African American population?
- 2) What famous novel was written in Monroe County, AL, and how is it relevant to *Just Mercy*?
- 3) Research *Loving v. Virginia*. What surprises you about this case? Do you think these issues are still relevant in our current times?

**Chapter 2**

- 4) Does your state have Stand Your Ground laws? Do you support them?
- 5) Do you think the police officers acted appropriately in Stevenson's case? How else might they have approached the situation?

**Chapter 3**

- 6) How does diversity in a jury affect its deliberations? Use both from the book and other sources.
- 7) In your opinion, who is most to blame for Walter's conviction? Why?

**Chapter 4**

- 8) Describe the 1982 Supreme Court ruling related to death penalty appeals. What impact did that have across the country?
- 9) What is "untimely" evidence? Was this a fair ruling, in your opinion, in Stevenson's appeals filing? Why or why not?

**Chapter 5**

- 10) While Stevenson is meeting Walter's family, do you think he is confident Walter will be free? How would you handle that situation?

**Chapter 6**

- 11) In what ways has the judicial system failed to protect Charlie?
- 12) . What is your opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Jennings?
- 13) What special circumstances of the murder victim lead to greater struggles for Charlie? Does this seem fair?

**Chapter 7**

- 14) How does the race of the victim factor into decisions about sentencing?
- 15) Stevenson and his team are able to discover a significant amount of new evidence. Thinking back to Chapter 5, are you any more hopeful now for Walter's release? Why or why not?

## **Chapter 8**

- 16) Describe what life was like for each of them before they were arrested. Should that understanding about their backgrounds make a difference in their sentencing? Why or why not?
- 17) How would you react to receiving a letter like the one Ian writes to Stevenson?

## **Chapter 9**

- 18) Of all the evidence presented in this chapter's trial, which is the most likely to sway the judge's ruling? Which is the least likely?

## **Chapter 10**

- 19) Describe some of the ways that George Daniel and Avery Jenkins are mistreated.
- 20) Describe who Dorothea Dix is and why is she important to this chapter and this book.

## **Chapter 11**

- 21) Walter's unfair incarceration took a permanent toll on his family. Can you relate to Walter's wife's reaction? Why or why not?
- 22) . Do you find this case to represent the best or the worst of our justice system? Why?

## **Chapter 12**

- 23) In what ways are female inmates more at risk than male inmates as described in this chapter?
- 24) . Reflect on the statistics Stevenson cites for the imprisonment rates of women compared to men in the past decade. What are some of the reasons that these rates are so different?

## **Chapter 13**

- 25) Should wrongfully imprisoned people receive financial restitution from the state? If so, how should the amount be determined?
- 26) Why is Stevenson concerned about Walter's return to his hometown?

## **Chapter 14**

- 27) Reflect on the types of things kids do, and that you have done as a kid, that could lead to criminal charges. In your opinion, are there ever reasonable situations where minors should be charged as adults? What are those circumstances?

## **Chapter 15**

- 28) In this chapter, Stevenson feels overwhelmed and is ready to quit. What issues is he facing that are causing him to struggle.
- 29) This chapter makes reference, not for the first time, to a correctional facility breaking the law. What should happen to correctional facilities and individuals that abuse their authority?

## **Chapter 16**

- 31) Two separate and surprising reactions occur during Robert Caston's hearing—what are they and why are they meaningful?
- 32) Describe your reactions to Stevenson's work to free people and bring justice to those within the prison system.