

A Time to Kill

by John Grisham

(Published in 1989)

Approved for use in English IV E: Crime Literature

Summary of the Work:

John Grisham's *A Time to Kill* begins with a description of a heinous crime detailing two intoxicated white men repeatedly beating and raping a ten-year-old African-American girl. The girl's father, Carl Lee Hailey, takes justice into his own hands by using a machine gun to kill the two rapists as the police escort the alleged rapists from the courthouse. Carl Lee hires local attorney Jake Brigance to defend him. Jake's lack of experience is compensated by his intellectual insights and skillful articulation as well as a competent team of assistants, including a brilliant law student and two local lawyers. The book focuses on the legal process with several lively court scenes.

Rationale:

A Time to Kill is an effective introduction to the Crime Literature course. Students follow the legal system from the crime through the final verdict and are exposed to an extended list of legal terms in the context of the story. The novel also has a relevant spot in Contemporary Literature since it provides exposure to popular best-selling books.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Wilson's Fiction 01/01/96

#1 New York Times bestseller

John Grisham was labeled as the "best selling novelist of the '90s" by Publishers Weekly.

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

- #1 New York times bestseller

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 770
- Readability Level: 7.1

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval:

Submitted to Committee: May 2005

Approved for Adoption: September 2005

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

A Time to Kill is written by a lawyer, whose detailed description of criminal investigation and courtroom scenes accompanied by his extensive use of legal terms provides an accurate overview of the American justice system.

The story is set in the fictitious Clanton, Mississippi, giving the reader some insight into the rural American South. The town is 85% African-American, yet the Ku Klux Klan rises to demonstrate the racism evident in America today.

Rich in perspective and conflict, the book presents a series of difficult moral conflicts, leading to class discussions on vigilante behavior, racism, justice, and human rights. The plot pulls in various perspectives to build conflict, from clashes between the KKK and NAACP, to the more subtle struggles between trial spectators and the citizens of Clanton. The reader can also view this trial through various legal viewpoints, including the police, defending and prosecuting lawyers, jurists, witnesses, victims' families, the judge, and courtroom spectators—as well as the families of everyone involved.

The book is appropriate for mature students because it has scenes with violent details and references to drinking, which underscore the book's tension.

Connection to the Curriculum:

A Time to Kill is a popular text in two sections of English IV: Crime Literature and Contemporary Literature.

This book is also an effective tool to reinforce student knowledge of characterization, tone, perspective, conflict, and theme.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

A Time to Kill is currently taught in two sections of English IV: Crime Literature and Contemporary Literature.