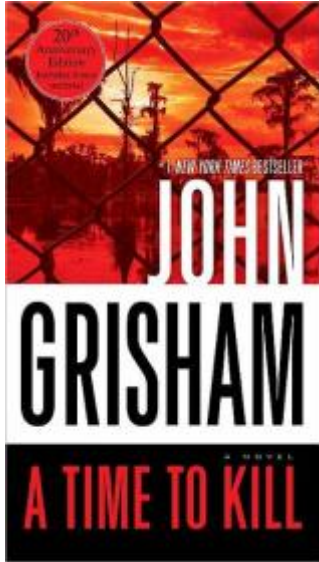


A Time to Kill

by John Grisham



About the Book

In this searing courtroom drama, best-selling author John Grisham probes the savage depths of racial violence... as he delivers a compelling tale of uncertain justice in a small southern town...

Clanton, Mississippi. The life of a ten-year-old girl is shattered by two drunken and remorseless young men. The mostly white town reacts with shock and horror at the inhuman crime. Until her black father acquires an assault rifle -- and takes justice into his own outraged hands.

For ten days, as burning crosses and the crack of sniper fire spread through the streets of Clanton, the nation sits spellbound as young defense attorney Jake Brigance struggles to save his client's life... and then his own...

Discussion Guide

1. How would you describe Sheriff Ozzie Walls?
2. Why did Tonya envision her father running "desperately" through the woods?
3. Talk about the town's reaction to Tonya's rape. What role does race play in the way the townspeople respond?
4. Why does Carl Lee Hailey shoot Cobb and Willard? What are the chances that the two men would have been convicted and sentenced? What were your feelings when Hailey shot them?
5. Is Carl Lee Hailey sane...or insane?
6. Why does Jake Brigance decide to take Carl Lee Hailey's case? What, according to Brigance, would a similar case normally cost?
7. Why does Brigance hang a portrait of William Faulkner in his office? What does Faulkner represent to him? And what is implied by the fact that, as Brigance notices, no streets or buildings are named after Grant or Lincoln?
8. Talk about the three families: the Haileys, Cobbs and Willards. How different are they? Do they have anything in common?

9. What do lawyers fight for—according to Chapter 10?
10. Describe Rufus Buckley. How do he and Jake Brigance compare with one another—in their beliefs, motivations and in the way they approach the law? Now compare Omar Noose. Why does Brigance liken him to Ichabod Crane?
11. How does Brigance's respond to Ethel's concern about the phone calls? What does this reveal about his state of mind?
12. What does Brigance reveal about himself during the *New York Times* interview?
13. Talk about the various decisions that Jake Brigance makes throughout the book? Are they ethical? Is Jake ethical?
14. What about Reverend Agee, who collects donations for the Hailey fund? Is he fair?
15. What is later revealed about Tonya? Has she recovered from her ordeal?
16. Talk about the role of court testimony by psychiatrists? How credible...or non-credible are they?
17. What have you learned in this book about way the legal system works? What are preliminary hearings, grand juries, and arraignments? Does the system work the way you believe it should?
18. Talk about the volunteer/pro bono team that assists Brigance. What do you think of Ellen Roark, for instance? What assets and liabilities does each team member bring to the Hailey case?
19. What is the significance of Jake's vomiting and weeping? How is this trial changing him? What is the (non-literal) meaning of the sentence, "Jake sipped his beer and searched for daylight through the window"?
20. Talk about the Ku Klux Klan and its role in the trial.
21. Examine Brigance's closing argument: how does he endear the jury to Dr. Bass and reestablish the relevance of the doctor's testimony? How does Brigance portray Buckley as a father figure? What part of Looney's testimony does he call to mind? Does his recalling the rape scene from Tonya's perspective help the insanity plea?
22. Talk about the jury...and the way in which it reaches its decision. Why are members unwilling to deadlock? How does Wanda Womack's proposal sway them?
23. After reading this book, has your attitude toward the legal system changed in any way?

Author Bio

Long before his name became synonymous with the modern legal thriller, John Grisham was working 60-70 hours a week at a small Southaven, Mississippi law practice, squeezing in time before going to the office and during courtroom recesses to work on his hobby --- writing his first novel.

Born on February 8, 1955 in Jonesboro, Arkansas, to a construction worker and a homemaker, John Grisham as a child dreamed of being a professional baseball player. Realizing he didn't have the right stuff for a pro career, he shifted gears and majored in accounting at Mississippi State University. After graduating from law school at Ole Miss in 1981, he went on to practice law for nearly a decade in Southaven, specializing in criminal defense and personal injury litigation. In 1983, he was elected to the state House of Representatives and served until 1990.

One day at the DeSoto County courthouse, Grisham overheard the harrowing testimony of a twelve-year-old rape victim and was inspired to start a novel exploring what would have happened if the girl's father had murdered her assailants. Getting up at 5 a.m. every day to get in several hours of writing time before heading off to work, Grisham spent three years on *A TIME TO KILL* and finished it in 1987. Initially rejected by many publishers, it was eventually bought by Wynwood Press, who gave it a modest 5,000 copy printing and published it in June 1988.

That might have put an end to Grisham's hobby. However, he had already begun his next book, and it would quickly turn that hobby into a new full-time career --- and spark one of publishing's greatest success stories. The day after Grisham completed *A TIME TO KILL*, he began work on another novel, the story of a hotshot young attorney lured to an apparently perfect law firm that was not what it appeared. When he sold the film rights to *THE FIRM* to Paramount Pictures for \$600,000, Grisham suddenly became a hot property among publishers, and book rights were bought by Doubleday. Spending 47 weeks on The New York Times bestseller list, *THE FIRM* became the bestselling novel of 1991.

The successes of *THE PELICAN BRIEF*, which hit number one on the New York Times bestseller list, and *THE CLIENT*, which debuted at number one, confirmed Grisham's reputation as the master of the legal thriller. Grisham's success even renewed interest in *A TIME TO KILL*, which was republished in hardcover by Doubleday and then in paperback by Dell. This time around, it was a bestseller.

Since first publishing *A TIME TO KILL* in 1988, Grisham has written one novel a year (his other books are *THE FIRM*, *THE PELICAN BRIEF*, *THE CLIENT*, *THE CHAMBER*, *THE RAINMAKER*, *THE RUNAWAY JURY*, *THE PARTNER*, *THE STREET LAWYER*, *THE TESTAMENT*, *THE BRETHERN*, *A PAINTED HOUSE*, *SKIPPING CHRISTMAS*, *THE SUMMONS*, *THE KING OF TORTS*, *BLEACHERS*, *THE LAST JUROR*, *THE BROKER*, *PLAYING FOR PIZZA*, *THE APPEAL*, *THE ASSOCIATE*, *THE CONFESION* and *THE LITIGATORS*) and all of them have become international bestsellers. There are currently over 275 million John Grisham books in print worldwide, which have been translated into 40 languages. Nine of his novels have been turned into films (*THE FIRM*, *THE PELICAN BRIEF*, *THE CLIENT*, *A TIME TO KILL*, *THE RAINMAKER*, *THE CHAMBER*, *A PAINTED HOUSE*, *THE RUNAWAY JURY* and *SKIPPING CHRISTMAS*), as was an original screenplay, *The Gingerbread Man*. *THE INNOCENT MAN* (October 2006) marked his first foray into nonfiction, and *FORD COUNTY* (November 2009) was his first short story collection.

Grisham lives with his wife Renee and their two children Ty and Shea. The family splits their time between their Victorian home on a farm in Mississippi and a plantation near Charlottesville, VA.

Grisham took time off from writing for several months in 1996 to return, after a five-year hiatus, to the courtroom. He was honoring a commitment made before he had retired from the law to become a full-time writer: representing the family of a railroad brakeman killed when he was pinned between two cars. Preparing his case with the same passion and dedication as his books' protagonists, Grisham successfully argued his clients' case, earning them a jury award of \$683,500 --- the biggest verdict of his career.

When he's not writing, Grisham devotes time to charitable causes, including most recently his Rebuild The Coast Fund, which raised 8.8 million dollars for Gulf Coast relief in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. He also keeps up with his greatest passion: baseball. The man who dreamed of being a professional baseball player now serves as the local Little League commissioner. The six ballfields he built on his property have played host to over 350 kids on 26 Little League teams.

Photo Credit: © Billy Hunt

Critical Praise

"Grisham's pleasure in relating the Byzantine complexities of Clanton (Mississippi) politics is contagious and he tells a good story...An enjoyable book."

— *Library Journal*

"Grisham excels!"

— *Dallas Times Herald*

"Grisham is an absolute master."

— *Washington Post*

"Grisham enraptures us."

— *Houston Chronicle*

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