



SAINT IGNATIUS

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May 1, 2021

Dear Class of 2022,

This summer the English Department is requesting that you spend some time engaged in summer reading. Please read below for information relative to your assigned summer reading title.

English IV

Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson

Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending those most desperate and in need: the poor, the wrongly condemned, and women and children trapped in the farthest reaches of our criminal justice system. One of his first cases was that of Walter McMillian, a young man who was sentenced to die for a notorious murder he insisted he didn't commit. The case drew Stevenson into a tangle of conspiracy, political machination, and legal brinkmanship—and transformed his understanding of mercy and justice forever.

Just Mercy is at once an unforgettable account of an idealistic, gifted young lawyer's coming of age, a moving window into the lives of those he has defended, and an inspiring argument for compassion in the pursuit of true justice.

Assessment

Upon your return from the summer break you will need to be prepared to engage in conversation with your classmates and teacher about the book(s) that you read. In addition, **you will compose an essay on the summer reading book that is due at the beginning of class on the first day of school.** Please see the attached materials for prompts, guidelines, and further information relating to this assignment.

Availability

If obtaining a copy of your assigned book is a financial challenge for your family, please contact me via email at tcaputo@ignatius.edu. Please be sure to have a copy of the text with you during the opening weeks of school. E-books are also acceptable.

Active Reading Strategies

The English Department recommends that students keep a reading journal and/or that they annotate their personal copies of their assigned summer reading text. An effective active reading process may include:

Recording chapter summaries. Take some time at the end of each chapter to write, in your own words, what the chapter was about.

Annotating while reading. Make notes on important events, character developments, symbols, use of literary elements, and your own observations.

Asking critical thinking questions. What questions do you have after reading your book? What are the issues, viewpoints, and themes of the book? How does the content of this book apply to your life or the lives of others?

We hope that the summer break provides you with some time to rest, reflect, and prepare for the new academic year at Saint Ignatius High School.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Terra Caputo".

Dr. Terra Caputo
Chair, English Department

English IV *Just Mercy* Essay Assignment

Choose ONE of the following questions to answer in a well organized, grammatically correct essay. Be sure to cite specific evidence to support your answer using proper MLA format for all citations. Your essay will be due on the first day of class.

1. Choose any person from the book and research and write a detailed explanation and/or description addressing the following
 - Explain why you chose that person.
 - Were they released? Were their sentences lessened? Did they die in prison?
 - If they were released or given a lesser sentence, why did that occur? What changed?
 - What they are doing now and how they have been affected by the criminal justice system.
2. The book does not address the perspective of Rhonda Morrison's family. Why do you suppose that is? Consider Stevenson's purpose and intended audience as you prepare your answer. Be sure to include specific textual evidence to support your response.
3. The theme of redemption is evident in Walter MacMillan's story when he is proven innocent. How is this theme also present in Stevenson's story? Explain how this theme is or is not present in at least one other person's story from the book.
4. The theme of just and unjust punishment is a major theme of the book. As Catholics, we are called to uphold an ethic of life regardless of guilt or innocence. Is there any justifiable cause for a death penalty? Explain and support your answer with specific textual evidence from *Just Mercy* as well as other sources. Be sure to cite all references.
5. Walter MacMillan's story parallels Tom Robinson's storyline in Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Explain the connection and use specific textual evidence from both books to support your answer. Explain how the setting (time and place) affects both Tom and Walter?
6. Throughout *Just Mercy*, there are many examples of oppression (systemic racism, poverty, lack of mental health services, and others) How might have events turned out differently for the men on death row or the women or the juveniles in prison had they not faced such barriers? Choose one of the barriers and research to see if and/or how they have changed since *Just Mercy* was written.

See the next page for information on organizing essays.

Introduction:

- Begins with a general yet related hook or grabber sentence
- followed by focus sentences that narrow the topic to your thesis statement.
- Include the **TITLE** (capitalized and punctuated correctly) **AUTHOR'S** full name and the **GENRE** (*Just Mercy* is a memoir NOT a novel.) in your focus sentences.
- Include **transitional words and phrases** to make your ideas flow more smoothly from one sentence to another.
- Thesis statement which should give your **SPECIFIC topic** and **general ideas** (in a word or phrase) of what you will be covering in the essay.

Body Paragraphs (note there should be more than ONE):

- Each point you are making about your topic should have its own paragraph or two.
- Remember a new idea needs a new paragraph, and the first sentence of a new paragraph is indented.
- Use transitional words and phrases to show the relationship between two sentences for better coherence.
- Include **TEXTUAL EVIDENCE** (specific quotations, events, etc.) to support your ideas.

Conclusion:

- Wrap up your main idea without repeating the information from the body paragraphs.
- Start with a **RESTATED** thesis statement and write more general sentences after that. These can be comments on the criminal justice system in general, or a commentary on what you discovered.

Common Transitional Words & Phrases (They are always followed by a comma.)

Relationship:

Adding Ideas:

Example:

Time:

Conclusion:

Contrast:

Result:

Examples:

In addition, Also, Furthermore, Moreover, etc.

For example, For instance, ... (**Avoid phrases like:** *Another example of this is when ...*)

Then, Next, Subsequently, After that, First, Second, Third, etc.

Finally, In conclusion,

However, In contrast, On the other hand,

As a result, Therefore,