

ENGLISH: *TWELVE ANGRY MEN*

“In Twelve Angry Men, the characteristics of gentleness and rationality are valued above all else.” Discuss.

Twelve Angry Men shows the impossibility of certainty. Set in a 1957 New York court of law, Reginald Rose’s dramatic play presents twelve varying jurors faced with the task of deciding whether an adolescent is guilty of murder. Rose’s most obvious message is that a jury should make a just decision based on the presence or absence of reasonable doubt, and by giving each juror different qualities he is able to demonstrate that the characteristic that best assets the achievement of justice is to be unbiased. Whilst kindness in a juror is admirable, and being logical is often useful in delivering a fair verdict, an unbiased juror has far more value than any other, and they are far more likely to vote in the way that best serves justice.

A mild-mannered juror is often well regarded, but this feature alone in a juror is not enough to guarantee a just decision. The shouting, rude, and violent 3rd juror demonstrates that some gentleness is necessary for the achievement of justice, however. Because of his aggression with anybody who disagrees with him, such as when he shouts at the 8th juror that a reasonable suggestion is “not possible,” or when he lunges at the 8th juror’s throat, the 2nd juror is too afraid to speak up to voice doubts he has with evidence. He only raises his point “as long as we’re stuck,” showing that his fear of how the 3rd juror will respond has kept him silent until now. Because aggression can prevent other jurors from engaging in “honest” and “thoughtful” deliberations, Rose encourages the audience to refrain from this behaviour if on a jury, and to instead be gentle like the 8th juror is, who is initially “smiling” and uses manners such as “no thanks.” However, a gentle juror does not guarantee that they are a just juror, as demonstrated by the 12th, who displays apathy during the deliberations. His mildness and politeness is evident in his complement to the 11th juror that “the finest watches come from Europe,” yet playing tic-tac-toe with the 3rd juror rather than actively taking part in the discussion demonstrates that he is not actively trying to get justice for the accused. Whilst a kind juror is desirable, this trait does not guarantee that they will make a just decision, and therefore this quality is not valued the most highly.

Like gentleness, it is also desirable for jurors to be logical. The extent to which this trait is needed is most apparent when examining those who are not logical or rational at all, such as the 10th juror, who quickly transforms from admitting that there are “some good things” about slum dwellers, before stating that “there’s not one, not one who’s any good.” This lack of logic demonstrates he is ignoring the judge’s advice to “deliberate...thoughtfully,” and by not thinking through the evidence it is impossible for him to vote in a way that upholds justice. The 8th juror, however, is an example of how logic can assist in determining if reasonable doubt is present, as he “take[s] two testimonies and tr[ies] to put them together,” which casts doubt on the evidence the elderly man provides. Logic can therefore assist a juror in making a decision based on reasonable doubt, and should therefore be highly regarded. However, it also does not guarantee that a juror will vote in a way that upholds reasonable doubt, as the 4th juror, perhaps the most logical of all who urges the other to keep their decisions to a “logical progression of facts,” is unable to recognise that the most just decision he can make is to vote “not guilty” until the very end. Whilst logic is necessary in any jury room, its presence does not guarantee that the most just decision will be made.

The characteristic that best guarantees a fair trial is that of being unbiased. Very few jurors are completely unbiased in their decision making, but the 8th juror is an example of how this trait allows someone to stop themselves being swayed by convincing Prosecuting Attorney arguments, and instead vote according to the presence or absence of reasonable doubt. By going into the jury-room with the facts un-“coloured by the personalities of those who present them,” the 8th juror is the only one who initially votes not-guilty, and whilst other gentle and rational jurors are able to vote for the accused to “die without talking about it first,” the 8th who is also unbiased is not. It is because of this that he perseveres to get a fair trial for the “16-years old” accused, not letting himself get influenced by the boy’s record of throwing a “rock at his teacher” or the fact that he comes from a slum. Whilst

the 4th juror is logical, he is not unbiased, and his belief that “slums are breeding grounds for criminals” prevents him from courageously fighting for a fair trial as the 8th juror does. The most important feature of a juror that Rose encourages his audience to have if they are ever on a jury is therefore objectiveness.

Whilst it is desirable for a juror to be kind and rational, a juror is only capable of making a fair decision if they are also unbiased. This is therefore the characteristic most highly valued, and is the trait that is necessary for an objective decision based on the existence or otherwise of reasonable of doubt to made.