12 Angry Men

Lesson Plan

Reginald Rose's *12 Angry Men* has been used to teach group dynamics, interpersonal behavior, and power and influence, since the early 1960s. Chapter 19 of my book, *Reginald Rose and the Journey of 12 Angry Men*, describes the movie's first use at National Training Labs in 1960, traces its adoption in business schools in the mid-1960s and 1970s, and describes its current use in classes around the world. I have taught it for many years to classes of executives from all over the world, and fine it remains an outstanding vehicle to learn about human behavior.

While some teachers show just a few clips from the movie, my preference is to show it in its entirety, followed by a classroom discussion. Such a lesson can fit into a three hour session, with the movie taking 90 minutes, followed by a short break and a 75 minute discussion. I have frequently used it in a multi-day program, showing it at the end of one day, with the discussion taking place the next morning.

Attached is my lesson plan with board plan for *two center boards* and *two side boards*. It can be used in conjunction with the slides, "12 Angry Men Lesson Slides 10 2021.pptx"

I am indebted to numerous instructors for some of the ideas here, including my IMD colleague Ginka Toegel, and my professor at UCLA, Eric Flamholtz.

Briefing before the movie:

I present the movie to students with the following words:

> We will watch *12 Angry Men*, a movie from 1957. It's not long – only about 90 minutes – and it does not have a complicated plot, but there's lots to see and learn.
>
> In particular, please pay attention to two different levels:
>
> First, look at the jurors as a *group*. What can we learn about the dynamics of the group? What do you see about roles, about authority, about power, about participation – and how these change over time?
>
> Second, look at one particular *individual*, Juror 8, played by Henry Fonda. How does he behave? What makes him so effective as he seeks to influence others in the group?

We then watch the movie in its entirety. I find it useful to show the DVD with captions (the hearing impaired option) especially if there are non-native English speakers in the class.

Discussion in Class

I use this plan for a discussion of about 75 minutes.

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Before addressing the core of the lesson, I let students raise any general comments. [Slides 1-4]

- *How many of you saw the movie for the first time? What were your impressions?*
  It's useful to let students express their feelings before we move to more analytical matters. Comments are generally very positive, as the movie captures the audience's attention and holds it for the duration.

- *Did you know any of these actors*?
  Slide 3 and Slide 4 let us see the jurors. Students may be familiar with some of the actors, including not just Henry Fonda (Juror 8) but often Jack Klugman (Juror 5) who starred in *The Odd Couple* and *Quincy, M.E.*. If students do not know Lee J. Cobb (Juror 3), I point out that he was the original Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* on Broadway, and played a corrupt union boss in *On the Waterfront*. An actor of great power, he was chosen to play Juror 3 in order to offer a strong emotional counterpoint to Fonda's Juror 8.

- *Where and when did this take place?*
  For an international audience, in particular, it's useful to be clear on the setting. The time and place is 1950s New York City. There are a few clues – e.g., the Woolworth Building and tickets to see the Yankees – but otherwise it could be any large American city.

- *Who is the defendant meant to be?*
  The defendant is referred to as one of "them," but his ethnic group is never stated explicitly. Given his brief appearance in two shots at the outset, and given the era and place, he is likely meant to Hispanic, perhaps of Puerto Rican origin. (The musical, *West Side Story*, premiered in 1957, the same year as this movie.) However, that is neither explicit nor very important. "Them" can be any minority (non-white) ethnic group.

- *Are there any questions about terms or legal procedures?*
  For a student group that includes people not from the United States, a few terms are useful. Any important ones can be recorded on the *right side board*.

  Hung jury. A jury that is unable to reach a unanimous verdict is called a hung jury. If the judge declares a hung jury, the prosecutor will have to decide whether to retry the case with a different jury or dismiss charges.

  Death penalty or electric chair: forms of capital punishment in use during the 1950s.

Who is chosen for jury duty? Any citizen 18 and older. They are selected at random from the broader population, and said to comprise a jury of peers.

How is the foreman chosen? Generally the foreman is the first juror chosen, and not selected based on any special qualifications. He is the first among equals, but has no formal authority.

Before we go into a discussion of the movie, I often briefly ask the question on Slide 5. Although I do not want a lengthy discussion at this time, it is worth mentioning, since to many viewers, the question of reasonable doubt provides the dramatic arc of the play. At the end of the discussion we will come back to this point and offer a different view!

With this introduction, we can move on to the two topics: group and individual.

2. Discussion of Group Dynamics (30 minutes)

12 Angry Men is effective at examining the behavior of the group – that is, group dymamics.

a. Let's talk about the jury as a group. What makes a jury an interesting example to study?

A jury is very useful for the study of group dynamics for a few reasons. I record these on the *left side board*.

Small size.
With 12 people, a jury is an ideal size to study what we call a "small group": it is large enough to have coalitions and factions, but small enough to sit around a single table, where all members can see one another directly. Groups that are smaller (e.g., three or four people) or larger (more than 15 or 20) will have different dynamics.

Newly composed for this purpose
No one is an old-time or a newcomer; no one knows anyone else.

Assembled at random
Jurors are picked from the broad population, and come from many backgrounds.

No hierarchy
They are all the same in power. The foreman is first among equals, but has no authority or formal power

In sum, a jury is what can be called a "pure group" – meaning that other elements – history, rank, tenure, and more – have been set aside, and what we have left is a pure group of 12 randomly assembled strangers.

Now that we've talked about the nature of small groups, recorded on the *left side board*, and summarized on Slide 7, we can talk about this particular group: the jury of *12 Angry Men*.

b. Let's consider the group we watched in the movie. How does it <u>feel</u> to be in this group?

I usually let students chat among themselves for a few moments, in what we call a buzz group. This way, students can take part in parallel conversations and engage more fully, rather than have to listen to one person at a time. Once they have had about 3-4 minutes to chat, I call the class to order and ask the question again, this time calling on individuals for a plenary discussion. Comments recorded on *left side, first center board.*

In general, the overwhelming feeling is one of *pressure* and *uncertainty*. Some reasons include:

- The task is very important – in fact, it is a matter of life and death
- The jurors are are given no guidelines, processes, or rules to follow
- There are no roles and no one is in charge
- They must reach a unanimous decision – a majority is not enough
- The task has no time limit – they will have to deliberate as long as it takes
- They are not expert in the law
- They are surrounded by strangers and do not know one another, adding to the anxiety

To all of this, there are further issues:

- The door is locked and they cannot leave
- It's hot and the air conditioning does not work
- The room is cramped

At times, when I ask "What does it feel like?," students focus immediately on the physical feeling of heat and discomfort. That's fine, but the heat is something the writer and director added to provide a physical aspect to their feelings. In fact, even if the room were comfortable and spacious, and the air conditioning worked, they would *still* feel the anxiety of an important decision, with no rules or limits, and surrounded by strangers.

Once the *left side, first center board* is filled with all the things that make the setting unpleasant and challenging, Slide 8, I ask what sorts of behaviors we observed.

c. If this is what it feels like, how do people act? What do we see them do?

Reginald Rose's script is replete with many examples from social psychology.

- *Avoidance*
  When faced with an unpleasant situation, a natural reaction is to avoid it. Rose's script includes many instances:
  - At the outset: "Let's vote, maybe we can get out of here"
  - Juror 7 wants to finish in order to go to the ballgame
  - Juror 10: "I heard a good story"
  - Juror 12: doodles with his advertising drawing.
  - Juror 3 and 12: play tic-tac-toe

- *Changing patterns of participation*
  - In the life of a group, there are often shifting patterns of participation – some members who speaks up early and others who stand back. At the outset, those who seem to be confident – Jurors 3, 4, 7, 10 – speak a lot, while others – Jurors 2, 5, 9, 11 – remain silent. Over time, these patterns change, with marginal characters begin to gain confidence and speaking up more and contributing their observations.

- *Attraction and repulsion*
  - There are several instances of jurors who find one another admirable or attractive, notably Juror 8, who whom some – notably Jurors 2 and 11 – want to join. Other men, notably Jurors 3 and 10, are repugnant, and some jurors – notably Jurors 5 and 6 – wish to disassociate themselves from them.

- *Reciprocity*
  - At one point, Juror 2 asks who would like a cough drop. Juror 8 says he'll have one, Juror 2 smiles and brings him one, then stands behind him. Does Juror 8 really need a cough drop? Probably not. They are making a connection, establishing a bond, and setting the stage for reciprocity – I give you something, you give me something back.

- *Displacement*
  - People often deal with stress by taking it out on someone nearby or weaker, which we see when Juror 3, in frustration, shouts at Juror 2 and tells him to be quiet.

- *Ostracism*
  - When Juror 10 unleashes his bigoted tirade, the others stand and turn their backs, a powerful example of social ostracism. Finally aware that his behavior is wrong and unacceptable to the others, he retreats to a secluded spot and sits silently for the duration.

- *Transference*
    - The climactic moment, when Juror 3 tears up the photo of his son, and collapses in agony, is an example of transference, as he realizes that he has shifted the anger he feels toward his son onto the defendant.

- *Conformity*

Of all the concepts from social psychology that are manifested in *12 Angry Men*, the most important one is social conformity. If a student mentions this point early in the discussion, I usually write it on the board but then defer a full discussion until after other points have been discussed. At that time, I broach it directly:

When do we see the phenomenon of social conformity?

We see it at several points!

- When the jurors take their first vote, the 11 hands for guilty do not all go up at the same time. About half go up immediately, followed a moment later by Juror 2, then 5 and 6, then 11, and finally 9. (This will be, approximately, the reverse of the order in which they shift to not guilty). The later ones watch the others and decide to go along – to conform. Only Juror 8 withstands the pressure for conformity.

- About a third of the way through the movie, when Juror 8 calls for a second vote, he asks that it be a secret ballot, which will reduce the pressure for conformity. Does 8 know who will join him? Probably not. It could be Juror 5, or 9, or someone else. But by now, he has done three things: he has provided a first vote for not guilty, making it easier for a second vote to join him; he has raised a number of possible reasons to doubt the evidence; and he has asked for a secret ballot. Even if he does not know precisely who will join him, he has made it possible for others to vote not guilty.

- Still later, as further votes change, Juror 8 uses public votes to place pressure on the remaining votes for conviction. When a majority of 9-3 favors acquittal, the pressure for conformity shifts. Juror 8 was courageous in standing alone against eleven at the outset, but does not shy away from using the power of conformity to put pressure on others.

- By the end, pressure for conformity is on the last holdout, Juror 3. The faces of the others, large and sober, place great pressure on Juror 3, who eventually cracks.

Here I spend time on the studies of Solomon Asch, mentioned in Chapter 19. Although Reginald Rose never studied psychology, nor is there evidence that he knew of Asch's research, his drama shows an extraordinary intuitive understanding of human behavior and conformity – of the pressures felt to go along with others in order to avoid standing out and being subjected to ridicule, and the reduced pressure for conformity when votes are secret, and when others have already been willing not to conform. [The section on Asch and conformity, including a diagram that explains his experiments, is on Slides 10 to 12]

The Foreman

At some point in the discussion, the role of the foreman, Juror 1, is likely to come up. When that happens, I record those comments on the *right side board*. If no one mentions the foreman, I find a way to ask about him:

What do you notice about the foreman? How would you describe him?

The foreman is important because of all the jurors, he is the only one who had a chance to exercise formal power. Although the foreman is the first among equals, and likely the first juror empanelled rather than chosen for any particular skills, he is positioned at the head of the table and initially in charge. From there, he can either consolidate his power – depending on his desires and his skill – or he can lose it.

What happens in *12 Angry Men*? The foreman fumbles away his power. When he calls the jury to order, he begins by saying: "You fellows can handle this any way you want. I mean, I'm not going to make any rules." Although he means well, he squanders any chance to lead the group. At various other times, as well, he seeks consensus rather than taking command.

We can then ask: ***If power moves from the foreman, where does it go?***

Initially the power seems to be up for grabs, and goes to those who talk the loudest, such as Juror 3 and Juror 10. Eventually, however, it settles on Juror 8. [Slide 13]

3. Juror 8: Influence without Authority [30 minutes]

Let's shift our attention to Juror 8, played by Henry Fonda. He is one of twelve jurors, with no more formal power – no more authority – than any other. Even so, he finds a way to influence others, even in the absence of formal power.

What does he do? What makes him so effective?

After asking this question, I once again allow students to discuss in small groups, so as to allow parallel conversations and achieve broad involvement.

After allowing 3-4 minutes, I pose the question in the plenary with comments recorded them on the *second center board*. There are plenty of things to observe, with a list of what he does, or procedural tactics, on the *left side second center board*, and a list of how he behaves, or interpersonal tactics, on the *right side second center board*.

What he does (Procedural tactics)

Among the things Juror 8 does includes: [Slide 14]

- He says he just wants to talk, rather than try to persuade anyone
- He asks for an hour, giving space for discussion and removing pressure to decide at once
- He defines the problem not as establishing innocence, but finding reason for doubt of guilt
- He uses visual and experiential tactics, such as the second knife, or simulating the walk to the door, not relying solely on words, but on images.
- He finds ways to engage those who may be sympathetic to him, such as Juror 2, as the timekeeper.
- He calls for votes at judicious moments, first using a private vote to reduce the pressure to conform, and later a public vote to cement support and to apply pressure on the remaining holdouts

How he acts (Interpersonal tactics)

The list here is a long one, with the points on Slide 15 are only a partial list. Some of his actions include:

- Asking questions rather than making assertions
- Establishing his expertise by citing the Constitution.
- Generally remains calm, and appears controlled and cool – although on two occasions (grabbing the tic-tac-toe and calling Juror 3 a sadist) is able to stand up forcefully and confront Juror 3 others. He thus displays versatility in behavior that is very effective.

Just as important is what Juror 8 does *not* do. He is, in fact, a model of restraint, picking his moments with care for maximim effectiveness.

- He does not try to persuade others at the outset, making clear that they need to persuade him.
- He did not immediately show the others the second knife, or even raise the matter himself, waiting until someone else mentioned the unusual murder weapon.
- He does not insist on having the last word, or feel the need to counter a good point
- He never makes it a personal issue, never uses *ad hominem* comments.
- He does not gloat or act triumphant when things go his way

In sum, what Juror 8 does so skilfully – what both demonstrates his power and augments his influence – is that he makes the room safe for others to speak up. A summary of his skills in group leadership is provided on Slide 16 – Juror 8 is, in many ways, a brilliant example of effective leadership in groups.

As summarized on Slide 17, although Juror 8 made some contributions himself, many key contributions came from others who were not able or willing to do so at the outset. The transformation of Jurors 2, as shown on Slide 18, is especially remarkable: initially meek and

lacking in confidence, he takes strength and grow in confidence, able to participate and contribute in important ways.

If time remains, I briefly summarize another aspect of Juror 8's skill: the ability to discern how the other jurors are part of different segment, and to tailor his actions to each. Some showed themselves early on to be opponents and adversaries [Slide 19]; some he observed as marginalized and therefore potential allies [Slide 20], and a third group represented undecided or swing voters [Slide 21]. Juror 8 is brilliant at finding ways to bring aboard the marginalized, to use the growing momentum to include the swing votes, and to apply pressure on those who were the strongest opponents.

When only three votes were left for guilty, Juror 10 self-destructed and was ostracized, leaving only Juror 3 and Juror 4. At this point, Juror 8 understood that he had to approach these two strong characters in very different ways. Juror 4 was a rational and analytical person, who had to be appealed to on rational grounds – thus the attempt to shake his confidence by showing his memory is not infallible. Eventually he is persuaded by a rational argument – that a key witness wore glasses but could have had glasses on at the moment of the killing. Juror 3,by contrast, is driven by emotion, not reason, and eventually is undone when he understands that his anger is directed at his son, not the defendant.

In closing, I like to come back to the question posed in Slide 5. Initially it seems as if the verdict for acquittal is based on a consideration of the evidence, with reasonable doubt leading jurors to vote not guilty. On reflection, however, only one juror – Juror 4 – changes his vote for purely rational reasons. The others are influenced by a variety of forces, many having to do with affiliation and repulsion (as when Juror 5 shifts), or other social and interpersonal issues. [Slide 22]

While *12 Angry Men* is rightfully a favorite of the legal profession, for its depiction of ordinary men overcoming prejudices to do their duties as citizens in a democracy, it is also a wonderful depiction of behavior in groups.

With that, I ask for any final reflections, including most important lessons learned, and close the session.