

ARENA'S PAGE

STUDY GUIDE

CONTENTS

THE PLAY

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT

MEET THE NOVEL'S AUTHOR

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

VIGILANTES

KU KLUX KLAN

ECONOMICS OF RACISM

COURTROOM VOCABULARY

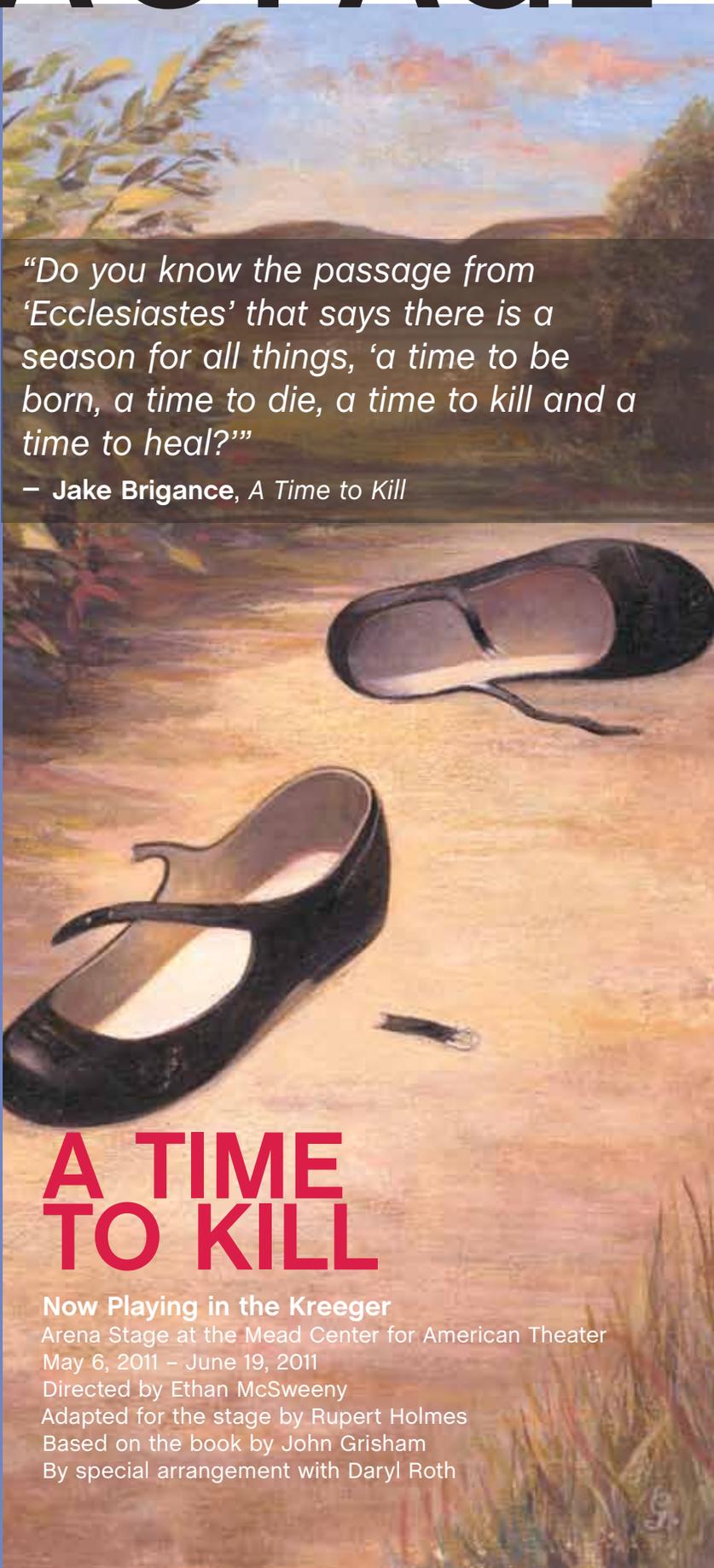
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

THE PLAY

Mississippi, mid-1980s: **Tonya Hailey**, a 10-year-old African-American girl, was walking home with groceries. Two white racists, stoned and drunk, drove by and decided to brutally rape and beat her. Afterward, they left her for dead.

While Tonya lies in a hospital bed, her two attackers are brought to court for justice. During the hearing, her father **Carl Lee Hailey** and attorney **Jake Tyler Brigrance** hear the graphic details of the crime, which has left the child permanently damaged. What justice can there be for such a horrible crime?

Outside the courtroom, the town is in uproar. With tempers hot and the Ku Klux Klan burning crosses, Clanton is divided, battling over justice, retribution and race. Within the courtroom, Jake must argue for the power of a father's love for his daughter and the true nature of justice.



“Do you know the passage from ‘Ecclesiastes’ that says there is a season for all things, ‘a time to be born, a time to die, a time to kill and a time to heal?’”

— **Jake Brigrance**, *A Time to Kill*

A TIME TO KILL

Now Playing in the Kreeger

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater

May 6, 2011 – June 19, 2011

Directed by Ethan McSweeney

Adapted for the stage by Rupert Holmes

Based on the book by John Grisham

By special arrangement with Daryl Roth

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT

RUPERT HOLMES



"For me, the most memorable adventures are still the perils that we face daily in life and love, from the mundane to the meaningful."
- RUPERT HOLMES, playwright

Born in England in 1947, Rupert Holmes is an American-British playwright, composer, singer-songwriter, musician and author. When he was 6 years old, Holmes moved to New York City, where he attended high school and majored in clarinet at Manhattan School of Music. Holmes' professional music career took off when Barbra Streisand discovered his work and recorded his songs in the mid-1970s.

In addition to his great success in the music industry, Holmes has received numerous theater awards, including Tony Awards for Best Musical, Best Score and Best Book of a Musical, as well as Drama Desk Awards for Outstanding Lyrics, Outstanding Music, Outstanding Book of a Musical and Outstanding Orchestrations. Most recently, Holmes joined the celebrated creative team of Kander and Ebb to write the book for the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical *Curtains*.

MEET THE NOVEL'S AUTHOR

JOHN GRISHAM



"I am fascinated by the law, by those who practice it, those who abuse and manipulate it, those who strive to protect it, those who study and teach it, those who are chosen to interpret it and especially by those ordinary people who are forced to deal with it, for better or for worse."
- JOHN GRISHAM, novelist

Born in Jonesboro, Ark., in 1955, John Grisham is an American author popular for his legal thrillers. Grisham graduated from Mississippi State University in 1977 and Ole Miss Law School with a specialty in criminal law in 1981. Following graduate school, Grisham practiced law for almost 10 years. He also served in Mississippi's State House of Representatives. Since publishing his first novel, *A Time to Kill* (1989), Grisham has written 20 books and sold more than 250 million books worldwide.

It took Grisham three years to write *A Time to Kill*. He woke up early to write before heading to the office.

VIGILANTES

vig-i-lan-te

a self-appointed doer of justice

Vigilantes give themselves the power to pursue and punish suspected criminals or offenders. They act outside the law.

Vigilante justice can be brought about by a lack of law: there's no one else to do it; so we will. Think of the Wild West when the good guys could kill the bad guys. Vigilantism can also stem from when the law seems to fail to exact justice: the punishment handed down by the government is insufficient for the crime. In both cases, vigilantes are motivated by their definition of what is right and what is just. ●

Robin Hood is a famous character and vigilante in English folklore, known for "robbing from the rich and giving to the poor." Another famous vigilante is Batman.



ACTIVITY: As a class, split into two groups and debate vigilante justice. What circumstances, if any, justify breaking the law to ensure justice? Use both factual and hypothetical examples in your arguments. The group in favor of vigilante justice should call itself the defendant. The group against it should call itself the prosecutor.

You might recognize one of Holmes' songs in particular:
"Escape
(The Piña Colada Song)."

INSPIRED BY A TRUE STORY

A Time to Kill is inspired by a real-life trial witnessed by John Grisham in 1984 while working as a lawyer in Hernando, Miss. Grisham heard a 12-year-old girl testify that she was assaulted and brutally raped. Grisham later said in an interview with *USA Today*, "When I walked away from the defendant, I was overcome with this thought that had this been my daughter, being as emotionally charged as I was and if I had a gun, I could have done it right there. Gotten my retribution." The idea for *A Time to Kill* was born. ●

KU KLUX KLAN



The Ku Klux Klan (abbreviated KKK) is a racist, secret society that uses terrorism to promote white supremacy in the United States. The KKK emerged following the Civil War and has been labeled America's first true terrorist group. At first, the KKK concentrated its violence on African-Americans, but over the years, it has broadened its focus to include violence against Jews, Catholics, homosexuals and immigrants. Although it is speculated that the KKK's membership has decreased since its founding in 1865, the organization is still active in 2011. ●

The official symbol of the racist hate group, the Ku Klux Klan. According to the KKK, the blood drop in the center represents the blood shed by Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for the White Aryan Race.



ACTIVITY: The Ku Klux Klan is still alive today. Research the KKK's history, paying special attention to the last 10 years. How has the KKK changed since its founding, immediately following the Civil War?



In the 20th century, members of the KKK began to wear common regalia: white robes, masks and conical hats designed to terrify and hide members' identities. Members of the KKK refer to the costumes as "glory suits."

COURTROOM VOCABULARY

Defendant – the person or organization being sued or accused of a crime.

Prosecutor – the lawyer representing the government and its laws.

Objection – a formal protest raised by a lawyer in court. After an objection, the judge makes a ruling on whether the objection is "sustained" (the judge agrees with the objection) or "overruled" (the judge disagrees with the objection)

Alibi – a form of defense in which the defendant attempts to prove that he or she was elsewhere when the crime in question was committed

Acquittal – when the defendant is found "not guilty" of a crime as charged

Arraignment – a hearing in which the defendant is called before a court to respond to a formal charge of a crime, this is when the defendant pleads "guilty" or "not guilty"



"Justice is a fine balance, your honor."
- Rufus Buckley, *A Time to Kill*

A statue of Lady Justice at Chuo University in Tama-shi, Japan. Also called Justitia, the Roman goddess of Justice, Lady Justice is a symbol of moral force in the judicial system. Justice is shown as blind and holding scales. Why is this?

THE ECONOMICS OF RACISM

Racism is an important issue in Clanton, the setting for *A Time to Kill*. The roots of racism in the South can be found in slavery, which established African-Americans not as human beings but as possessions to be bought and sold.

In the 17th century the Portuguese began importing African slaves to the Americas to cultivate and grow tobacco. Soon after, the English, French and Dutch joined the slave trade.

The passing of the **Reconstruction Amendments** after the Civil War marked a turning point in the history of African-Americans. These amendments abolished (ended) slavery, granted citizenship to now-free slaves, and prohibited the government from denying people of color the right to vote.

Southerners felt they were being punished for the Civil War. Southern states responded to these amendments by adopting "Jim Crow" laws that established racial segregation in all public facilities (restaurants, schools, etc.). Jim Crow law was based in the idea of "separate but equal." Often these laws restricted the civil rights and liberties of African-Americans.

For example, Jim Crow laws made it difficult for African-Americans to exercise their right to vote.

Wealthy white Southerners encouraged poor white Southerners to enforce Jim Crow laws. This made Jim Crow a way of life. The aristocracy taught poor Southerners that no matter how poor they were, at least they were white, and being white was better than being black. This message of superiority gave poor Southerners hope and deeply embedded racist sentiments between races in the South.

In what way does this history inform your understanding of the racial tension and conflicts in *A Time to Kill*? What is its legacy today? ●

Reconstruction Era: the difficult and volatile time period after the Civil War in which laws and acts were passed to rebuild the South, ensure its loyalty and attempt to undo the damage of slavery.

Amendments: changes made to the U.S. Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land.



ACTIVITY: Arena Stage's production of *A Time to Kill* is staged in the Kreeger Theater, a modified thrust space in which the audience observes one stage, directly in front of them (as opposed to a theater-in-the-round). If the stage is a courtroom, where should the jury go? What about the judge? Brainstorm ways in which the director and set designer can orient the space so that the audience can always see the actors.

Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
 - Visit the restroom before the show starts.
 - Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.
 - Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.
 - Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!
 - Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.
 - Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.
 - Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
 - Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.
 - Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.
 - Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.
- Enjoy the show!**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

- *A Time to Kill* by John Grisham
- *The Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi: A History* by Michael Newton
- *Vigilante!* by William E. Burrows
- *John Grisham: A Critical Companion* by Mary Beth Pringle

On the Web

- John Grisham: Biography & Interview: www.bookreporter.com/authors/au-grisham-john.asp
- John Grisham marks 20th anniversary of *A Time to Kill*: www.usatoday.com/life/books/news/2009-06-21-john-grisham-a-time-to-kill_N.htm
- Official John Grisham Website: www.jgrisham.com
- *Escape from Piña Coladaville* by Meryl Gordon, a *New York Magazine* feature story on Rupert Holmes: www.rupertholmes.com/writings/new_york_mag_081103.html
- *Introduction to the U.S. Legal System*: public.findlaw.com/library/legal-system/
- *A Timeline of the KKK*: www.timelinesdb.com

On DVD

- *A Time to Kill* – motion picture, Regency Enterprises & Warner Bros. Pictures
- *Ku Klux Klan: A Secret History* – documentary, The History Channel



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Visit www.arenastage.org
for more information on
Arena Stage productions
and educational opportunities.

For other research and articles pertaining to *A Time to Kill*, visit Arena Stage's Sub/Text: Your Virtual Dramaturg at www.arenastage.org/shows-tickets/sub-text/.