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INGUIN ACTIVE READING

LEVEL 2

# The Last Juror

John Grisham



# Contents

	Activities 1	iv
Chapter 1	A Very Big Story	1
Chapter 2	The Padgett Trial	6
	Activities 2	10
Chapter 3	More Guns, More Blood	12
Chapter 4	In Jail, but Free	16
	Activities 3	20
Chapter 5	Room 25	22
	Activities 4	28
Chapter 6	A Juror Dies	30
Chapter 7	Who's Next?	33
	Activities 5	36
Chapter 8	Miss Callie Remembers	38
Chapter 9	Back in the Courthouse	45
	Activities 6	48
Chapter 10	The Killing Stops	50
	Talk about it	56
	Write about it	57
	Project: A Trip Around the World	58

### 1.1 What's the book about?

Talk to another student.

- 1 Do you know any of John Grisham's books, or any of the movies from his books? What kind of stories does he write?
- 2 Read the first four lines of Chapter 1. What do you think this story is about?
- 3 What picture do you have of small towns in the south of the United States? Discuss the houses and the stores, the people and their lives.

### 1.2 What happens first?

Look at this picture. What do you think? Circle the best word in each sentence.



- 1 The man looks *happy* / *afraid* / *angry*.
- 2 He is in his *house* / *office* / *store*.
- 3 The gun is *his* / *a friend's* / *a killer's*.
- 4 He is planning to *fight* / *kill* / *talk to* somebody.

## A Very Big Story

*"The Padgitts have a lot of money. They can buy people, or hurt people. They will want to help Danny. So be careful."*

**F**ord County in Mississippi isn't the most exciting place in the United States. Not much happens in Clanton, the small town at the center of Ford County. Most of the time it's quiet and people live there without any big problems. Most of the time ...

But in March 1970, something did happen in Clanton. There was a **murder**. You don't forget a murder. Thirty years later, I can remember everything about that day. My name is Willie Traynor, and in 1970 I was the **editor** of the Ford County newspaper, the *Times*. I talked to the dead woman's sister and her neighbors. I talked to the **lawyers** and the police. I wrote the story for the *Times*, and some weeks later I sat through the **trial**. And I was a friend of one of the **jurors**.

Rhoda Kassellaw was the dead woman. She met her killer in a bar. They talked and then they danced. But when the man wanted more, she pushed him away. He was very angry. Rhoda left the bar and he followed her home. He saw the light in her bedroom, and he quietly went in the back door. Rhoda's killer had a knife and he cut her many times.

Rhoda's neighbor, Mr. Deece, found her. Before she died, she spoke to him. "Danny Padgitt," she said. "It was Danny Padgitt." Those were her last words. Mr. Deece called the hospital and the police, but it was too late for Rhoda.

**county** /'kaunti/ (n) Each *county* in the state of Mississippi has a number of towns in it.

**murder** /'mɜːdə/ (n/v) A killing is *murder* when the killer wanted to kill the dead person. It was not an accident.

**editor** /'edɪtə/ (n) The *editor* is the top man (or woman) in a newspaper office.

**lawyer** /'lɔːjə/ (n) When you have a problem with the police, a *lawyer* can help you. Lawyers understand the *laws* of a country better than other people.

**trial** /'traɪəl/ (n) After the police catch somebody, there is often a *trial*. Then that person is free again—or not.

**juror** /'dʒʊrə/(n) At important trials there are twelve men and women *jurors*.



Danny Padgitt drove away from Rhoda's house as fast as he could. But it was dark and Danny was afraid. He didn't drive carefully. When an animal ran across the road in front of him, his car left the road. It turned over, then hit a tree. Danny climbed out through a window. Then he saw the blue lights of a police car.



Danny Padgitt lived outside Clanton, near the Big Brown River, with his family. The Padgitts were a bad family and they usually stayed away from the town. The people of Clanton stayed away from them, too. The Padgitts had a lot of money, but nobody knew how, or how much. "It's dirty money," people said. "The Padgitts hurt people. They killed for their money."

I heard a lot of stories about the Padgitts when I came to Clanton. They were all bad stories. But I never met any of the family.

I heard about Danny Padgitt at about midnight and I went quickly to the town **jail**. There were a lot of policemen outside the jail. A police

**jail** /dʒeɪl/ (n) When people do something very bad, they go to *jail*.

car arrived and Danny Padgitt got out. There was **blood** on his clothes. I started to think about my story for the newspaper.

**Sheriff** Coley came out of the jail and I pushed through the policemen.

“Sheriff, can you answer some questions, please? What can you tell me about the murder?” I asked him.

“A white woman, age thirty-one,” he said.

“Did you **arrest** anybody?” I asked.

“Yes, we arrested a man, but I can’t give you his name now. Ask me again in two or three hours.”

“Danny Padgitt?”

“I can’t say, Mr. Traynor.”

I left the jail and drove to Rhoda’s house. There were police cars outside, and some of her neighbors.

“I think Rhoda had a boyfriend,” one man told me. “He’s a lawyer in town.” But he didn’t know the man’s name.

I asked some other neighbors about Rhoda, but she lived quietly. Most people didn’t know much about her.

I wrote my story for the front page of the newspaper. Next to it, I put a picture of Danny Padgitt outside the jail. He was between two policemen. We sold a lot of newspapers that week.

The people of Clanton talked about the Kassellaw murder in every **café** and bar in town. They also talked about it at their dinner tables in many Clanton homes. Callie Ruffin’s home was one of them.

Every Thursday I had lunch at the house of Esau and Callie Ruffin. In 1970, black people and white people didn’t live on the same streets. In Clanton, black people lived in Lowtown. This was across town from my house. The Ruffin house was in Lowtown.

I first met Callie Ruffin when I wrote a story about her family. Everybody in Clanton called her Miss Callie. She had eight children, and

**blood** /blʌd/ (n) When you cut your finger, red *blood* runs out.

**sheriff** /ˈʃerɪf/ (n) The *sheriff* is the most important policeman in an American town.

**arrest** /əˈrest/ (v) When you do something very wrong, the police will *arrest* you.

**café** /kæˈfeɪ/ (n) You can usually eat quickly and for little money in a *café*.

# e Last Juror

John Grisham

American English  
*Contemporary*

In the small town of Clanton, Mississippi, not much happens. There aren't many interesting stories for Willie Traynor's newspaper. But then there's a murder. And when the killer goes to jail, that's not the end of the story. Everybody is afraid now of this man and his family. Will there be more killings? Who will be next?

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The Last Juror

John Grisham

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