

## Littérature et civilisation anglophones | '12 Angry Men' (film)

### A short introduction and analysis of the ideas developed in the motion picture

#### Introduction

'12 Angry Men' is a 1957 film directed by Sidney Lumet. It is an American courtroom drama. The film tells the story of 12 men as they decide the fate of an 18-year-old defendant who is on trial for the murder of his own father. They are deliberating the conviction or acquittal of this young man. The film takes place in one setting – in the jury



Sidney Lumet

deliberation room. The film follows the jury as they shift from believing the young man is guilty to changing their mind because of reasonable doubt presented in the case. "12 Angry Men" is Lumet's first film and was met with widespread acclaim. It was indeed selected as the second-best courtroom drama (after "To Kill a Mockingbird" released in 1962).

#### Symbols and Motifs

Definition of 'motif': *'a subject, an idea, or a phrase that is repeated and developed in the work of literature or a piece of music'*. [Oxford Learner's Dictionary]

#### 1 | Voting

Throughout the deliberation process, the jurors have to vote. However, every time they vote, one of them changes his mind about the verdict they have to **unanimously reach**. The motif of voting is here a symbol of democracy. It is a symbol of the ways the men must meet together to come to a conclusion as one group, even though they may have different and various points of view.

#### 2 | The Secret Ballot and The American Legal System

The movie deals with the idealistic principles behind the American legal system which attempts to **achieve a fair trial** through the use of **unbiased citizens** in on a jury.



#### Sixth Amendment of the US Constitution [Extract]

*"In all criminal prosecutions the accused shall enjoy the right to a **speedy** and **public trial**, by **an impartial jury** on the state district wherein the crime shall have been committed. [...]"*

However, in the film, most of the jurors are far from being unbiased as they hold and expressed **deep-rooted** [deep-seated] prejudices towards young man. It is thus clear that the message of the film is to show that the ideal of the American legal system and the sixth amendment are difficult to achieve in real life.

#### **Example of prejudices towards the defendant:**

At one point, one of the jurors complains about the defendant and the fact that he is a foreigner [**Hispanic**] and poor. He even complains that the 18-year-old young man: **"don't even speak good English"**. **This is of course ironic since this sentence is itself not grammatically correct in English.**