

Sycamore Row by John Grisham

Questions for Discussion

1. How is the novel shaped by the place in which it's set? How would the story be different if it were set elsewhere? In a big city? In the North?

2. How is the novel shaped by the era in which it's set? How would the story be different if it occurred today? How would the existence of cell phones and the Internet change this story?

3. If Seth is of sound mind and not unduly influenced by anyone, why do you think he attempts to right his family's wrongs in this manner - through a posthumous letter and a holographic will - knowing that it will provoke such intense conflict? Are his actions considerate of Lettie? Are they unfair to his family? Do they put Jake in an unnecessarily difficult position? In the same situation, what would you have done?

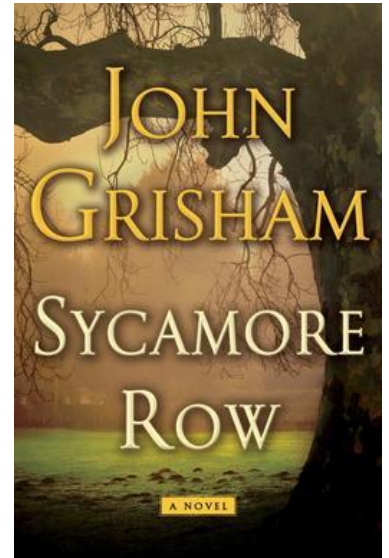
4. Do you think the verdict - all five parts of it - was correct? Do you think Judge Atlee's modification of the verdict was fair?

5. Do you think Judge Atlee was a good judge? In the instances where he allowed legally questionable evidence to be presented, did he make the right choices?

6. On page 92, Lucien and Jake debate the differences between the Carl Lee Hailey trial and the upcoming Hubbard trial. Jake tells Lucien, "That was all about race. This is all about money." Lucien replies, "Everything is about race in Mississippi, Jake, don't ever forget that." Who do you think is right? Are they both right?

7. How does the theme of forgiveness shape this novel?

8. Public opinion can play a significant role in influencing juries and, therefore, verdicts - but public opinion isn't necessarily shaped by objective facts. How did gossip, exaggerations, rumors, and out-right lies (both printed and spoken) shape the trial outcome?



9. What role did memory play in the legal proceedings? For Lettie? For Ancil? For the jury?
10. What did you learn about the legal process in reading this novel? Did it change your perception of lawyers or America's judicial system?
11. Who in this novel exhibits selflessness? Who exhibits selfishness? Are there characters who exhibit both? Who is the hero of this novel?
12. How responsible are we for the actions of our ancestors?