



## *Gray Mountain by John Grisham*

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### **About the author:**

Long before his name became synonymous with the modern legal thriller, John Grisham was working 60-70 hours a week at a small Southaven, Mississippi law practice, squeezing in time before going to the office and during courtroom recesses to work on his hobby—writing his first novel.

Born on February 8, 1955 in Jonesboro, Arkansas, to a construction worker and a homemaker, John Grisham as a child dreamed of being a professional baseball player. Realizing he didn't have the right stuff for a pro career, he shifted gears and majored in accounting at Mississippi State University. After graduating from law school at Ole Miss in 1981, he went on to practice law for nearly a decade in Southaven, specializing in criminal defense and personal injury litigation. In 1983, he was elected to the state House of Representatives and served until 1990.

One day at the DeSoto County courthouse, Grisham overheard the harrowing testimony of a twelve-year-old rape victim and was inspired to start a novel exploring what would have happened if the girl's father had murdered her assailants. Getting up at 5 a.m. every day to get in several hours of writing time before heading off to work, Grisham spent three years on **A Time to Kill** and finished it in 1987. Initially rejected by many publishers, it was eventually bought by Wynwood Press, who gave it a modest 5,000 copy printing and published it in June 1988.

That might have put an end to Grisham's hobby. However, he had already begun his next book, and it would quickly turn that hobby into a new full-time career—and spark one of publishing's greatest success stories. The day after Grisham completed **A Time to Kill**, he began work on another novel, the story of a hotshot young attorney lured to an apparently perfect law firm that was not what it appeared.

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When he sold the film rights to **The Firm** to Paramount Pictures for \$600,000, Grisham suddenly became a hot property among publishers, and book rights were bought by Doubleday. Spending 47 weeks on The New York Times bestseller list, **The Firm** became the bestselling novel of 1991.

The successes of **The Pelican Brief**, which hit number one on the New York Times bestseller list, and **The Client**, which debuted at number one, confirmed Grisham's reputation as the master of the legal thriller. Grisham's success even renewed interest in **A Time to Kill**, which was republished in hardcover by Doubleday and then in paperback by Dell. This time around, it was a bestseller.

Since first publishing **A Time to Kill** in 1988, Grisham has written one novel a year (his other books are **The Firm, The Pelican Brief, The Client, The Chamber, The Rainmaker, The Runaway Jury, The Partner, The Street Lawyer, The Testament, The Brethren, A Painted House, Skipping Christmas, The Summons, The King of Torts, Bleachers, The Last Juror, The Broker, Playing for Pizza, The Appeal, The Associate, The Confession, The Litigators, Calico Joe, The Racketeer, Sycamore Row, and Gray Mountain**) and all of them have become international bestsellers. There are currently over 300 million John Grisham books in print worldwide, which have been translated into 40 languages. Nine of his novels have been turned into films (**The Firm, The Pelican Brief, The Client, A Time to Kill, The Rainmaker, The Chamber, A Painted House, The Runaway Jury, and Skipping Christmas**), as was an original screenplay, **The Gingerbread Man**. **The Innocent Man** (2006) marked his first foray into non-fiction, and **Ford County** (2009) was his first short story collection.

Grisham lives with his wife Renee and their two children Ty and Shea. The family splits their time between their Victorian home on a farm in Mississippi and a plantation near Charlottesville, VA.

Source: Author's website (<http://www.jgrisham.com/>)



### **About this book:**

The year is 2008 and Samantha Kofer's career at a huge Wall Street law firm is on the fast track—until the recession hits and she is downsized, furloughed, and escorted out of the building. Samantha, though, is offered an opportunity to work at a legal aid clinic for one year without pay, all for a slim chance of getting rehired.

In a matter of days Samantha moves from Manhattan to Brady, Virginia, population 2,200, in the heart of Appalachia, a part of the world she has only read about. Samantha's new job takes her into the murky and dangerous world of coal mining, where laws are often broken, communities are divided, and the land itself is under attack. But some of the locals aren't so thrilled to have a big-city lawyer in town, and within weeks Samantha is engulfed in litigation that turns deadly. Because like most small towns, Brady harbors big secrets that some will kill to conceal.

*Source: Penguin Random House (<http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/>)*

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Talk about the characters, both good and bad. Describe their personalities and motivations. Are they fully developed and emotionally complex? Or are they more one-dimensional heroes and villains?
2. What do you know...and when do you know it? At what point in the book do you, the reader, begin to piece together what happened?
3. Good crime writers are skillful at hiding clues in plain sight. How well does the author hide the clues in this work?
4. Does the author use red-herrings—false clues—to purposely lead readers

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astray?

5. Talk about plot's twists & turns—those surprising developments that throw everything you think you've figured out into disarray. Do they enhance the story, add complexity, and build suspense? Are they plausible? Or do the twists & turns feel forced and preposterous—inserted only to extend the story.

6. Does the author ratchet up the story's suspense? Did you find yourself anxious—quickly turning pages to learn what happened? How does the author build suspense?

7. What about the ending—is it satisfying? Is it probable or believable? Does it grow out of clues previously laid out by the author (see Question 2). Or does the ending come out of the blue? Does it feel forced...tacked-on...or a cop-out? Or perhaps it's too predictable. Can you envision a better, or different, ending?

8. Are there certain passages in the book—ideas, descriptions, or dialogue—that you found interesting or revealing...or that somehow struck you? What lines, if any, made you stop and think?

9. Overall, does the book satisfy? Does it live up to the standards of a good crime story or suspense thriller? Why or why not?

Source: LitLovers (<http://www.litlovers.com>)

**Other formats available at Halifax Public Libraries:**

- Audiobook (on CD and as digital download)
- eBook
- Large Print

April 2016