Take notes on the book, focusing on the questions below. Your notes will be checked and graded. In addition to the note check, the book will be discussed in class. You will be asked to write a reflection on the book, either as an essay on a test or as an individual assignment. Your teacher may also incorporate objective questions from the book on your first quiz or test.

We believe you will find the book to be compelling. It tells an interesting and important story about the criminal justice and penal systems in our country. We value this book as a summer reading, especially since it hits on many of the pillars of the Grad at Grad. Enjoy your summer and we look forward to seeing you in a few months!

1. What personally happened to the author, Bryan Stevenson, that forced him to reflect on the ethics of the U.S. criminal justice system? Has anything similar to his experience been a part of your experience? Does race make a difference here? Why? Has his career choice process made you stop and consider the importance of being “for and with” others in your future career choice? Explain the title of this book. Where did it come from?

2. What famous novel was written in Monroe County, AL, and how is it relevant to Just Mercy? Be specific. Why does it annoy Stevenson that the novel is a point of pride in Monroeville?

3. In what ways did the economic policies of Alabama disadvantage the state’s African American population? Be specific and cite from the book.

4. What are the “Stand your Ground” laws? What impact do they have in the state’s that have them? Be specific. Do you agree with these laws? Why?

5. What is the importance of the 1986 Batson vs. Kentucky court ruling?

6. What happened to Walter McMillian in the criminal justice system? How did race and economic class factor into his case? Do you agree with the outcome of his trial? Explain.

7. How did Herbert Richardson’s experience as a Vietnam vet impact his life? Do you agree with the verdict and sentence he received? Explain. What impact did it have on the author?

8. Give one example from the book where the jury selection process impacted the outcome of a trial case. Is this process just or unjust in your opinion? Why?

9. Describe the 1982 Supreme Court ruling related to death penalty appeals. What impact did it have across the country?
10. Define the 2002 Supreme Court case of Atkins vs. Virginia. How is it relevant to this book?

11. In what ways did the judicial system fail to protect the fourteen year old boy, Charlie? What special circumstances of the murder victim led to greater struggles for Charlie? What role did Mr. and Mrs. Jennings play in this case? What is your opinion of them?

12. What evidence did criminologists have in 1991 to support their "Superpredator" theory? What role did race play in this theory? What do we now know about this theory's validity?

13. Describe the case of Trina Garnett. What factors most determined the outcome of her case? Do you agree with this outcome? Why/not?

14. Do you agree with the outcomes of the cases against Antonio Nunez and Ian Manual? Do you see any patterns or trends that continue to impact these kinds of cases?

15. How have the information and human stories in this book impacted your views on the US criminal justice system? Give several examples from the book.

16. How did Ralph Myers impact the case of Walter Richardson? Why was he trusted by authorities?

17. How did religious faith and spirituality impact the lives of the persons in this book, including Bryan Stevenson? Give examples.

18. Who is Vaclav Havel and what hope and inspiration did his thoughts give to the author? Who or what gives you inspiration and hope despite the injustices of this world?

19. What statistics are offered in this book regarding the imprisonment rates of women compared to men in the past decade? Why are these rates different?

20. What were the important factors in Marsha Colbey’s case? Do you think justice was served in this case? Why/not?

21. How did the 1996 Congressional bill that reformed welfare impact the criminal justice system? Do you think that legislation was just? Why/not?

22. Should wrongfully imprisoned people receive financial restitution from the state? If so, how should the amount be determined?

23. Describe the Supreme Court case that the author was involved in Chapter 14.

24. How did the events of September, 2001, impact the fight to appeal death penalty cases? Do you think the US should keep the death penalty? How does your view of faith/religion influence your position?

25. How did the justice system fail Jimmy Dill?

26. What does “stonecatcher” mean and can you think of anyone who fits the description?

27. Are you hopeful or pessimistic about the future of our criminal justice system?