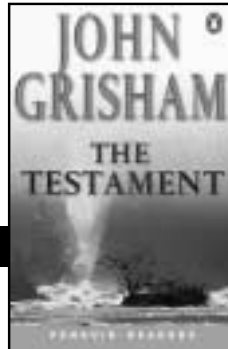


Teacher's notes

The Testament

by John Grisham



SUMMARY

The *Testament*, published in 1999, is about a 78-year-old man's last will and testament. This man, Troy Phelan, is the tenth richest man in America, worth about eleven billion dollars. His three ex-wives and six children cannot wait for him to die so they can get their hands on his money. But he has other plans and cleverly masterminds a hoax so that they believe they will inherit all of his estate. When they leave after the signing, he produces another will, then jumps out the window, committing suicide in front of his astonished lawyers. In the last will he leaves a small amount to his six children, nothing to the ex-wives, and a fortune to an illegitimate daughter, whom he has been unable to trace.

A lawyer, Nate O'Riley, who is in the hospital for drug and alcohol abuse, is sent to find her in the jungles of Brazil, where she lives among the Indians in very primitive conditions. This daughter, Rachel Lane, is a missionary and a doctor. She has turned her back on the United States and is dedicating her life to doing "God's work." Nate risks his life looking for her, and when he finally finds her, she does not want to sign the papers and she does not want any of Phelan's money. Nate does not stop there because he is determined not to let Phelan's money-hungry family get Rachel's inheritance. After recovering from dengue fever, a type of malaria, he returns to Brazil only to find Rachel's grave. Before she died of malaria, she wrote a last will and testament, instructing Nate to put the money in a trust to be used for the World Tribe Missions around the world.

ABOUT JOHN GRISHAM

John Grisham was born in Jonesboro, Arkansas on February 8, 1955. In 1981 he received his law degree from the University of Mississippi. He practiced both criminal and civil law in Southaven. In 1983, he was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives and in 1989, he published his first novel, *A Time to Kill*. His second novel, *The Firm*, published in 1991 was his first big success as a writer of legal thrillers. Since then,

he has gone on to write ten more bestsellers, six of which have been made into blockbuster movies. It is said that he earns well over \$25 million a year from his books and from movie rights. He is a born-again Christian, attends a Baptist church on Sundays, teaches at Sunday school, and works with overseas orphans. He is married with two children, and divides his time between his home in Charlottesville, Virginia, and Oxford, Mississippi.

BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

The American passion for money and great wealth and all the destructive consequences of this passion is the main theme of *The Testament*. Greedy wives and greedy children employ greedy lawyers in pursuit of wealth. They are selfish and dishonest people. In spite of their wealth, they spend more money than they have, so they are never happy and always "need" more. Family life is destroyed in the process. Alcoholism and drug abuse ruin marriages, careers, and health. This fast-paced life is full of stress. The character Nate O'Riley tries rehabilitation, but he is weak and cannot resist temptation. Then he meets the illegitimate daughter of Troy Phelan and she helps him to pray. Prayer gives him strength and it is this that starts the curing process.

Rachel Lane's life in the jungles of Brazil is difficult but rewarding. Her faith and her dedication to helping the poor, the hungry, and the sick are what make her life rich. She does not want to live in America ever again and she is not tempted to accept the billions of dollars her biological father has left her. It is only when she knows she is dying that she takes Nate's advice and accepts the money in order to put it in a trust for the missionaries to buy medicine, food and clothing for the native people in Brazil and South America. The common Grisham theme that good overcomes evil is the satisfaction readers hunger for as they consume this fascinating story.

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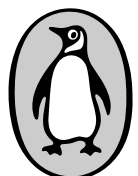
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Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book see the Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are for use with class Readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access center.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- 1 Ask the students to think about what is important for a good life and to put these in order of most important to least important for them. Then ask them to compare with other students.

Health Family Money Religion Profession Modern Conveniences

- 2 Ask students to discuss these questions in pairs: If you inherited \$1 million, what would you do with the money? If you inherited \$11 billion dollars, what would you do with it?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1-3

- 1 Ask students to work in pairs to make a Family Tree diagram for Troy Phelan. Write his name in a box at the top with three branches leading to three boxes below with the names of the three ex-wives in each box. Below each wife, students should write the names, and ages if given in these chapters, for each child. They should write the name of their spouses in parentheses, if given in the chapter. (They will add to this as they read further into the story.)

Lillian: T.J. 47 yrs (Biff), Rex 44 yrs (Amber), Libbigail, Mary Ross

Janie: Rocky - dead, Geena 30 yrs (Cody Strong)

Tira: Ramble 14 yrs

- 2 Put these figures on the board. Ask students to work in pairs to find these amounts in the story and to write sentences using them.

(a) 2,000 (b) \$11 billion (c) \$90,000 (d) \$5 million
(e) \$7 million

Chapters 4-6

- 1 Ask the students to work in small groups to discuss the following questions.
 - (a) How does Grisham develop Nate's character in chapters 4 and 5?
 - (b) How would you describe Nate's personality?
 - (c) Do you think he's the right man for the job? Why (not)?
- 2 Tell the class to imagine that Nate is a friend of theirs, it's the day after Christmas, and he has just phoned them. Have the students work in pairs and prepare a roleplay of the telephone conversation.
- 3 Discuss with the class Grisham's attitude toward Phelans' heirs in the courtroom when they learn about the last will and testament of their father.

Chapters 7-9

- 1 Ask the students to work in small groups and to put these threats to Nate's life in order from the most dangerous threat to the least.

beer alligators getting lost engine trouble Indians
the weather mosquitoes
- 2 Ask students to work in pairs and to roleplay the conversation, from memory, between Malcolm Snead and Hark Getty in chapter 8.

Chapters 10-12

- 1 Ask students to write the first page of Nate's three-page letter to Rachel (page 77). Then allow students to read each others' letters and to decide who has written the best letter.
- 2 Ask students to work in small groups and to discuss why Nate's meeting Rachel has affected him so much. Does this seem realistic? Is her character believable? Why has she visited him, then disappeared?

Chapters 13-15

- 1 Put students in pairs and ask them to roleplay one of the scenes from the courtroom between Nate and the Phelan heirs (Troy Jr., Rex, Libbigail, Mary Ross, Ramble, Geena) or Snead.

Glossary

It will be useful if your students know these new words. They are practiced in the "Before You Read" sections at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.)

Chapters 1-3

alligator (n) a large reptile that lives on land and in lakes and rivers
charge (v) to (cause to) take in and store electricity
cremate (v) to burn (the body of a dead person) at a funeral ceremony
estate (n) all of a person's property, especially as left after death
file (n) a box, folder, etc. for storing papers in an ordered way
heir (n) the person who has the legal right to someone's property when that person dies
illegitimate (adj) born to parents who are not married
lawsuit (n) a matter brought to a court of law for decision for a decision by a private person or company, not by the police or the state
mission (n) a place run by a religious organization where medical services, teaching, etc. are provided for the local people
psychiatrist (n) a doctor trained in the treatment of the mind
satellite (n) a man-made object, like a telephone, that uses wavelengths, not wires
swamp (n) land which is always full of, or covered with, water
testament (n) a person's will
tribe (n) a group of people of the same race, beliefs, customs, language often under the leadership of a chief
vodka (n) a strong, colorless, and almost tasteless alcoholic drink, made originally in Russia
will (n) an official statement of the way someone wants their property shared out after they die

Chapters 4-6

airstrip (n) a stretch of land that can be used by aircraft to take off and land
deckhand (n) a man or boy who does unskilled work on a ship or boat
hammock (n) a swinging bed made of strong cloth or net which can be hung up at both ends
navigate (v) to direct the course of a boat or ship
paddle (v) to move a boat through water using a short pole with a wide flat blade
repellent (n) a substance that drives insects away
settle (v) to bring a matter to an agreement; to end an argument in law
suicide (n) the act of killing oneself

Chapters 7-9

mosquito (n) a small flying insect that sucks blood from people and can cause people to get malaria
tributary (n) a river that flows into a larger river

Chapters 10-12

malaria (n) a disease carried by some mosquitoes which causes high fever and coldness
rash (n) red spots on the skin caused by illness
dengue (n) a disease similar to malaria, but with a different type of rash

Chapters 13-15

trust (n) an arrangement for controlling money for someone else



Student's activities

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These activities can be done alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

Activities before reading the book

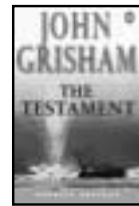
- Read the Introduction. Do you think that
 - Troy Phelan is a young man? Why?
 - Troy Phelan loves his family? Why?
 - Phelan's illegitimate daughter lives with him? Why?
 - Nate O'Riley knows Phelan's illegitimate daughter? Why?
 - Pantanal is in the United States? Why?
- Look up these words in your dictionary and circle the words that are used especially after someone dies.
will swamp testament cremate satellite heir estate psychiatrist

Activities while reading the book

Chapters 1-3

- Answer the following questions.
 - Why does Phelan sign one will in front of the psychiatrists and his family and another will after they leave the room?
 - Why does he want the will kept secret until January 15, 1997?
 - How much money does he leave his heirs - the children of his three ex-wives?
 - What kind of person do you think Rachel Lane is?
 - How do Phelan's children react to his death?
- Are these statements about Nate O'Riley true or false? Circle the answer.
 - Nate is a lawyer who works with Stafford and Durban. T F
 - He has been married and divorced two times and has two children. T F
 - He is physically strong, sporty, and likes adventure. T F
 - At 20, he began drinking too much alcohol and taking drugs. T F
 - After he lost a lawsuit, his drug and alcohol abuse got worse. T F
 - He agrees to go to Brazil because he owes money to the government. T F
 - He is going to meet a lawyer in Corumbá who has a boat. T F

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- He is not worried about the snakes and alligators. T F

Chapters 4-6

- Complete these sentences.
 - If the Brazilian government kept track of missionary groups in the country...
 - If the airstrips weren't grassy ...
 - If there weren't alligators in the rivers ...
 - If it hadn't been the rainy season ...
 - If Nate hadn't seen the men sharing a bottle of beer ...
 - If Marco's cow hadn't been on the airstrip ...
 - If Nate hadn't agreed to pay the one hundred dollars ...
 - If the army commander hadn't sent a helicopter ...
- Complete this application form for Rachel Lane. South American Missions Application

Last name	.....
First name	.....
Date of birth	.....
Place of birth	.....
Mother's name	.....
Died	.....
Father's name	.....
Died	.....
Adoptive father	.....
Occupation	.....
University	.....
Dates	.....
Subject studied	.....

- The names of the people in the left column are important to the people in the right column. Match them. Then compare your answers with another student and discuss the relationships.
 - Welly Geena Strong
 - Neva Collier Libbigail Phelan
 - Mr. Grit Mr. O'Riley
 - Ms. Langhorne Rachel Porter
 - Wally Bright Mary Ross Phelan Jackman

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Student's activities

Chapters 7-9

- Fill in the missing subject in the sentences below.
 - clear large areas of land for farming.
 - kill the fish in the Pantanal River.
 - will drain the Pantanal.
 - reduced the Indian population in Brazil.
 - used the Indians as slaves.
 - used chemical weapons to wipe out the Indians.
 - also wiped out the Indians in the U.S.
- Who is speaking in the following quotes from the story? What is the situation?
 - "Rachel Lane disappeared many years ago."
 - "You mean we can't leave here when we want?"
 - "He wants us to stay here tonight, in the village."
 - "A storm hit ... it rolled the boat over in the middle of the night."
 - "You're part of a culture where everything is measured by money."
 - "I've tried to kill myself at least twice."

Chapters 10-12

- Fill in the missing words. Do not look back in the story.
Dengue fever is (a) by mosquitoes. People who have it think they have (b) But the (c) is different. They suffer from (d) fever, (e) muscles and joints, (f) thirst, shooting (g)....., and sweating. It can result in (h)..... Dengue fever sufferers (i) things that are not there and they believe (j)..... ghosts.
- Are these statements True or False? Write T or F on the line.
..... (a) Rex Phelan knows that Snead could break their lawsuit, so he wants to pay Snead to say that Phelan was crazy when he made the last will.

- (b) Hark Gettys signs a contract that Snead has written and gives him \$500,000,000.
..... (c) Troy Phelan had sex with Nicolette all the time.
..... (d) Josh wants Nate to lie to Judge Wycliff because Rachel could change her mind.
..... (e) If Rachel doesn't accept Troy Phelan's money, his seven children and three wives will share the estate.

Chapters 13-15

- How did Nate feel when
 - he watched Austin play soccer?
 - he left Salem, Oregon?
 - met Daniel?
 - Kaitlin wouldn't see him?
 - he saw Rachel's grave?
 - he read Rachel's last will and testament?
- Which character in the story do you like the most. Why? Which of the Phelan heirs do you like the least? Why? And which lawyer do you like the least? Why?
- In the end, how much money do the Phelan heirs receive? How much does Hark Gettys receive? What happens to the money left to Rachel?

Activities after reading the book

- Imagine it is one year after the Phelan lawsuit ends. What have the Phelan heirs done with their money? What has changed in Pantanal? How has Nate's life changed? Write Chapter 16. What's the title?
- Imagine you are a newspaper reporter and you are writing an article about the Rachel Lane Porter Trust. Write about Rachel's life and death and the Trust. You may wish to include an interview with Nate O'Riley.

