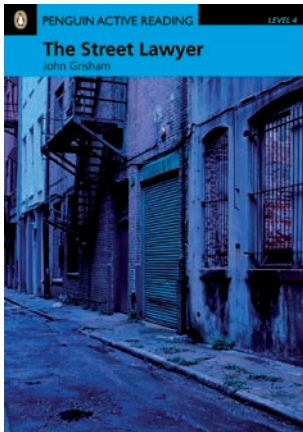




The Street Lawyer

John Grisham



Summary

Michael Brock is a wealthy and successful lawyer in Washington DC, but one day a homeless old man walks into the office armed. The old man is shot by the police, and Michael soon realizes that his law firm, Drake & Sweeney, had made the old man homeless. With his marriage breaking up, Michael decides that he can no longer work for the law firm. He meets Mordecai Green, who runs a law firm which helps the homeless, and decides to join him. He steals a file from Drake & Sweeney's which proves that the company evicted the old man and other tenants. Michael leaves his wife and begins work in a shelter for the homeless. When the police arrest Michael for stealing the file, Mordecai Green defends him. An agreement is reached and Michael starts a new life.

Chapter 1: An old black man gets into the meeting room at Drake & Sweeney, an important law firm employing eight hundred lawyers. "Mister" threatens Michael and his eight colleagues with a gun and sticks of dynamite. He has been evicted and is homeless and hungry. After telling the boss, Arthur Jacobs, to order soup with bread, he asks what the lawyers have eaten and how much they earn. He keeps asking who did the eviction. When the soup arrives, a policeman opens the door and shoots him dead.

Chapter 2: Michael is examined by doctors. He wonders why his wife Claire, a doctor, has not come to see him. Happy to be alive, he gets home to an empty apartment. His marriage is not going well: he works long hours to become a partner one day. She began doing the same as a sort of competition. Claire arrives and explains she had to stay at the hospital until the situation at the law firm ended. The next morning they hear in the news that Mister, whose real name is DeVon Hardy, had been evicted from a warehouse by Drake & Sweeney.

Chapter 3: Michael drives his expensive car to a small law firm to see Mordecai Green, a lawyer who helps the homeless. They talk about Mister and Michael learns that a company called RiverOaks, whose lawyers are Drake & Sweeney, owns the warehouse where he lived. Green tells him the eviction was illegal because Mister was a tenant and not a squatter. They exchange phone numbers.

Chapter 4: Back in his expensive office, Michael finds his work does not make sense anymore. He searches for information on RiverOaks, but he gets very little because it is a private company. Their lawyer is partner Braden Chance, who works in real estate. Michael goes to his office, asks if Mister was a squatter and requests the eviction file. Chance refuses. Later, he suggests to Claire they have a vacation but, as she cannot leave work, he visits his parents in Memphis. His father does not like the idea of Michael leaving the firm to work for the homeless.

Chapter 5: Back home, he finds Claire is away for a few days. Mordecai phones him to ask for help at a shelter for the homeless and Michael agrees. It is so cold and there are so many people that the volunteers are not enough. He sees the Burtons: a mother and her three young children sleeping. The next day he does some shopping for that family but he does not see them. Then he hears on TV that they have all died. They were asleep in a car with its engine running and the poisoned air killed them.

Chapter 6: Michael and Mordecai go to the hospital morgue. They see the bodies. Michael is determined not to let that happen again and pays for the funeral. After that, there is a march to Capitol Hill. Mordecai gives a moving speech about the last night of the Burton family. Then he offers Michael a job at the law center for much less than his salary. Michael tells Claire he has accepted. She then visits a divorce lawyer and he leaves the apartment.

Chapter 7: On Michael's last day at the office, he discovers somebody has left him some hints to help him find more information about the people evicted by the law firm. Hector Palma, Chance's legal assistant, has left two keys: one to Chance's door and the other to the file drawer. Michael will take the RiverOaks file, photocopy it at the 14th Street Law Center and return it in around an hour. But just as he is leaving Drake & Sweeney's with the file he has a car accident and ends up in the hospital.

Chapter 8: Michael does not stay in hospital for long. He has to find a new apartment and recover the file from the wreck of his car. He meets Hector at a bar and Hector



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pretends they have never met. They are very careful, as their conversation is being recorded. They talk about the missing file and about the fact that Michael's fingerprints have been found on the file drawer. When Michael reads the file, he notices there is a note missing.

Chapter 9: Michael has his first clients: homeless people who are in that condition because they are not getting money that should be theirs. One of them, Ruby, has been in and out of prison for taking drugs. Her only child does not want to speak to her any longer. With the help of Sofia, Mordecai's secretary, Michael finds the right place for Ruby: a center for women with a drug problem. There he meets Megan, the young woman in charge of the Center.

Chapter 10: One night Claire's call wakes Michael up: the police are in her apartment, searching for a file. The next day he tells Mordecai the truth: he has taken the RiverOaks file and discovers that there is a missing note where Hector, the lawyer in charge of the eviction, has written that the evicted were tenants. Mordecai suggests starting a lawsuit against the law company, but first they have to find Hector. Two days later Michael meets Hector in Drake & Sweeney's offices in Chicago. Michael persuades Hector to give him a copy of the missing note. With the evidence that the eviction was illegal, he goes back to Mordecai's office in Washington, only to discover that the police are there to take him to prison.

Chapter 11: Michael stays in prison for a few hours until Mordecai gets him out on bail. A good-looking white man in a cell with four young black gang members, Michael has a difficult time. Next morning his stay in prison is news in the *Washington Post*. He meets Megan again, which makes him feel good.

Chapter 12: It is Drake & Sweeney's turn to appear in the *Washington Post*. News that Mordecai and Michael are starting a four million dollar lawsuit for the death of the Burton family is a strong blow for the law firm. Arthur Jacobs suggests having a meeting with Michael, Mordecai, and a judge.

Chapter 13: The negotiation is difficult but Mordecai gets Drake & Sweeney to pay \$25,000 each to all the evicted people and \$3 million for the Burton lawsuit. The law firm will stop the theft lawsuit against Michael, and Michael will lose his license for only nine months.

Chapter 14: As Michael cannot work as a lawyer he starts a *pro bono* program and, to his surprise, Arthur Jacobs will help by sending 400 of his Washington lawyers to help homeless people. Michael needs help inside Drake and Sweeney, so he asks to work with Hector, who will come back from Chicago in a month. Megan, Ruby and Michael spend the following weekend outside the city: Michael has started a completely new life.

About the author

John Grisham was born on February 8, 1955, in Arkansas, in the United States. Grisham as a child dreamed of being a professional baseball player. However, after graduating from law school in 1981, he went on to practice law for nearly a decade, specializing in criminal defense and personal injury litigation. In 1983, he was elected to the state House of Representatives and served until 1990. Although his first novel, published in 1988, was not very successful, his second book became a bestseller and was turned into a movie. He has written many more books, most of them about lawyers and court cases.

Background and themes

The legal system in the United States: The American Bar Association (ABA) is a professional organization for American Lawyers. It encourages the study of law and the betterment of the legal system.

Homelessness: A growing number of people in big cities are homeless. They lose their jobs and cannot afford the rent or they leave home because of violence. Local governments have shelters, which are usually crowded. Some charities run hostels, and soup kitchens where they offer hot food. Most homeless people survive by begging.

Discussion activities

Chapters 1–2

Before reading

- Guess:** Ask students to read the title of each chapter on the contents page. Get them to say whether each title refers to a person, a place, or a company/firm. Then refer them to the phrases in italics under the title of chapter to check.
- Discuss:** Have student talk about being a lawyer. Discuss the following questions.
What must you do to become a lawyer in your country? What does a lawyer usually do in your country? And in the United States? What makes a good lawyer? Are they paid good money? Would you like to be one? Why (not)?



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While reading

- 3 **Research and discuss:** Have students discuss attitudes toward the poor and homeless.
Mister asks, "Why can't you help poor, homeless people?" (p. 5) How can we help the poor?
Encourage students do research on the Internet about Muhammad Yunus, a Bangladeshi economist and Nobel Peace Prize winner whose bank gave micro-credit to poor people. Have them share their findings.

After reading

- 4 **Write:** Have student talk about working for an important law firm. Ask students to suppose they are Michael and get them to write a passage describing work at Drake & Sweeney to be published in a magazine for law students.

Chapters 3–4

Before reading

- 5 **Guess:** Ask them to look at the picture on page 12. *Where is Michael driving? What is his car like?* Then they check their predictions on pages 12–13.

While reading

- 6 **Discuss:** Ask students to find information about Martin Luther King. Then get them to discuss why there was a picture of him at the Law Center.
7 **Write:** Have students make a business card. On page 13, Michael hands Mordecai his card. Ask students to design it.

After reading

- 8 **Role play:** Ask students to work in pairs and suppose Michael's father is caring and understanding instead of being interested in money and position. *How would he react to his son's decision?* Get them to role play the conversation.

Chapters 5–6

Before reading

- 9 **Guess:** Ask students to look at the picture on page 29. *Who is Michael with? What are they doing there? Whose feet? Are they people Michael knew? What has happened?*

While reading

- 10 **Role play:** Have students review page 26 where Michael and Mordecai talk about their families. Ask students to role-play the conversation in pairs.
11 **Write:** Have students write the speech Mordecai is preparing for the march (page 31). In small groups, students make notes about what to say. Then one member of each group says the speech out loud.

After reading

- 12 **Write:** Have students write Michael's diary entry. On page 32, Michael says: "I wasn't the same person I had been before." Ask students to write an entry in Michael's diary explaining the reason for the change and how he feels about his job and his marriage now.

Chapters 7–8

Before reading

- 13 **Guess:** Ask students to read the words in italics under the title of Chapter 7.
What is the note about? Who do you believe has left that note? Get them to speculate about the possible connections between this note and Michael's meeting with Braden Chance.

After reading

- 14 **Discuss:** Have students talk about the missing file. Get them to discuss how Michael discovered the truth about the eviction and why Hector played an important role in the eviction. Engage them in speculating why Barry Nuzzo visited him at the 14th Street Law Center.

Chapters 9–11

Before reading

- 15 **Guess:** Have students make a list of the things they believe Michael can do for his new clients.

While reading

- 16 **Discuss:** Have students talk about Michael's new clients. In pairs, students complete a chart with the names of Michael's clients, their problems and the solutions he proposes.

Names of clients	Problems	Solutions
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- 17 **Role play:** Have students play a scene about the missing file. Ask them to read page 55 and try to imagine the conversation between Michael and Mordecai when the young lawyer tells the street lawyer the story of the RiverOaks file. Have them role-play the encounter.

After reading

- 18 **Check:** Have students answer the following questions.
What did you learn about street lawyers working in Washington DC?
Why is it that some people who have a job live in shelters such as the Samaritan House? What is the condition for street lawyers to take new clients? What are the most common problems street lawyers in Washington have to solve? Where do street lawyers get the necessary information for their cases?

Chapters 12–14

After reading

- 19 **Discuss:** Have students talk about the media. Divide them into four groups and have them focus on the power of the media and how their intervention changed the course of events in this story.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word list and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.