



The Runaway Jury

John Grisham



About the author

John Grisham was born on February 8, 1955, in Jonesboro, Arkansas, in the United States. His father was a construction worker and moved his family all around the southern states of America, stopping wherever he could find work. Eventually, they settled in Mississippi.

Graduating from law school in 1981, Grisham practiced law for nearly a decade specializing in criminal defense and personal injury litigation. In 1983, he was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives and served until 1990. Although he was very busy, he always made time to write, completing his first novel, *A Time to Kill*, in 1988.

Grisham's second novel, *The Firm*, was one of the biggest hits of 1991, spending 47 weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list. Grisham was then able to give up law and concentrate on writing. Since then, he has written 20 novels and one non-fiction book. Most of them have been best-sellers and many have been made into movies, including *The Runaway Jury*. Grisham lives with his wife and two children in Mississippi and Virginia.

Summary

Pynex, of the "Big Four" tobacco companies in the United States, is being sued by Celeste Wood, the widow of a man who died from lung cancer after smoking cigarettes all his adult life. But The Big Four have a secret fund of money, managed by Rankin Fitch, which they use, by any means they can, to win their court cases. First, the lawyers for Pynex and Wood decide which of the jurors they want for the case. Fitch cannot find out anything about a juror named Nicholas Easter. This is not his real name, and he has an interest in trials involving tobacco companies, but Fitch does not know this.

Then Fitch receives a note from a woman called Marlee, who gives him secret information about members of the jury and what they will do. All her information turns out to be accurate.

They agree on a deal because Fitch believes that she can deliver the verdict he wants.

Marlee demands ten million dollars from Fitch to get the right verdict and the tobacco companies agree to pay. Marlee uses the money to trade in shares of the companies, forcing their value down. Fitch finally discovers that Marlee's parents both died of lung cancer caused by smoking. He discovers, too late, that he has been tricked. The jury find the tobacco companies guilty and award Celeste Wood \$400 million in damages. Nicholas and Marlee buy tobacco shares at a very low price and make a fortune. Finally, Marlee confronts Fitch and returns the \$10 million, but warns him that she will keep watching the case.

Chapters 1–3: The people in charge of the four biggest tobacco companies meet with Rankin Fitch who manages a fund used to help those companies win lawsuits. He reassures them that the defense team is doing what is needed to defend the Pynex tobacco company against the widow of Jacob Wood, a longtime smoker who died of lung cancer. Durwood Cable (the lawyer representing Pynex) and Wendall Rohr (the lawyer representing Wood) help select the jury of twelve, including Nicholas Easter.

In the courtroom, Nicholas recognizes Fitch as well as numerous jury consultants from an earlier tobacco trial. From the start, Nicholas takes charge of problems faced by the jury.

Nicholas is brought to the attention of Fitch by a woman named Marlee via a note that correctly identifies the clothes Nicholas will wear the next day. Fitch has a man check out Nicholas's apartment and Nicholas catches this on his security camera.

Meanwhile, Fitch's people plan to apply pressure to one of the jurors, Lonnie Shaver. Lonnie, a manager at a grocery store, finds out that his store will be taken over by a large chain. His role with the new company is uncertain.

Nicholas tells the jurors about problems there have been in past cases when people tried to control the jury. He tells them about jury consultants.

Nicholas talks with one of the jurors (Colonel Frank Herrera) and finds out he has little patience for people



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who smoke. In court, Nicholas sees the man who broke into his apartment and asks to see the judge. He tells the judge that he has been followed by that man and he also passes along his concerns about Herrera's comments. The judge encourages Nicholas to keep him informed about any problems with the jurors.

Chapters 4–6: Marlee calls Fitch again and sends a fax to Rohr with inside information about the jurors.

Nicholas demonstrates his knowledge of the legal process. He tells members of the jury the tobacco industry has unlimited funds to fight the case.

The judge decides the jurors will need to spend the rest of their time sequestered in a motel.

Meanwhile, Fitch and his people continue to investigate the jurors and consider ways they can be influenced.

Lonnie meets the head of the supermarket company as well as the company lawyer (Taunton). Taunton tells Lonnie the tobacco industry cannot lose this case as that would be bad for business. Later, Lonnie gets another call from Taunton who wants to talk about the trial and arrange the details for his new contract.

Fitch finds out that a juror (Rikki Coleman) had an unplanned pregnancy as a young woman. He feels he can use this against her, if needed.

Meanwhile, a realtor named Hoppy (the husband of one of the jurors) is encouraged to get involved in a profitable but potentially illegal transaction.

In court, the prosecution calls on a number of witnesses, including one (Lawrence Krigler) who had done research on growing a tobacco leaf with less nicotine. He tells the court the tobacco company was not interested in the product because it knew nicotine was addictive and recognized that the nicotine would attract more smokers.

Fitch investigates the files from two earlier tobacco trials (looking at photos and handwriting samples). He sees that a potential juror for both of these cases seems to be Nicholas (who has been using other names).

Chapters 7–9: Fitch's people continue their dealings with several of the jurors.

Millie's husband, Hoppy, is visited by men who say they are the FBI. They tell him they have a tape of him discussing an illegal transaction. They say Hoppy's problems could go away if he would persuade his wife to vote in favor of the tobacco industry.

Fitch arranges for another break-in at Nicholas's apartment. The apartment is set on fire. Among other things, they find Nicholas's mother's name and address and confirm Nicholas's earlier name (Jeff Kerr).

The reader learns that Nicholas and Marlee fell in love four years ago. Marlee's mother had died and left her two hundred thousand dollars. Nicholas left law school and they traveled to different places, followed tobacco trials, and learned about nicotine, lung cancer and jury selection.

Fitch's people track down Nicholas's record at law school (under another name) and also find out Marlee's name (Claire Clement).

Meanwhile in court, the next witness for the plaintiff is Leon Robilio, a victim of throat cancer who worked for twenty years for the tobacco industry and left that job when he got cancer. He said the industry aimed its advertising at teenagers because cigarettes were addictive and teenagers became addicted quicker than adults.

Later, Hoppy is given a false report about Robilio, written by Fitch's people, that he is told to pass along to his wife.

In court, an economist discusses how much Jacob Wood's future earnings would have been. Wood's widow (Celeste) also discusses how her husband could not quit smoking because of his addiction.

Fitch tries to figure out the number of jurors who will side with the tobacco industry. Nine votes are needed by either side for a verdict. With the help of Marlee, Fitch feels he has those votes. However, Marlee tells Fitch that if he continues to investigate her past, she will stop talking to him.

Meanwhile, Rohr's people talk to Derrick Maples, the fiancé of another juror (Angel Weese). Derrick is in financial trouble and is told that if he can encourage Angel to vote for the plaintiff then he will receive some money.

Chapters 10–12: The tobacco company begins its defense with D. Martin Jankle, CEO of Pynex, saying that choice is the issue and cigarettes (like other products) need to be used responsibly.

Dr. Denise McQuade (another witness for the defense) tells the court that advertising is everywhere and other companies are not accused of targeting the young.

Hoppy is threatened with prison if Millie does not support the tobacco company.



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Nicholas breaks into Colonel Herrera's room and puts a magazine under his bed that has an article about the case. Marlee tells Fitch that Herrera has been annoying Nicholas. Then Nicholas informs the judge about the magazine. Herrera's room is searched and Herrera, who had been supporting the tobacco companies, is dismissed from the jury and replaced with another.

Fitch meets with her and they make a deal for ten million dollars to be sent to her bank before the verdict is given.

Marlee asks for information about the other jurors and arranges money for several of them. Fitch agrees to the transfer of money to Marlee.

Millie talks about Hoppy's problems with Nicholas. Marlee investigates and determines the problems are a scam arranged by Fitch. Marlee gets information about Rikki Coleman from Fitch but finds there is nothing on Herman Grimes (foreman for the jury). Hoppy arranges for the FBI to arrive on the scene during his next meeting with Fitch's men and uncovers the scam.

Chapters 13–15: Fitch tells Marlee about Millie and suggests getting her off the jury. However, Marlee says that Millie will vote the way Nicholas wants. She tells Fitch they have nine votes now.

Meanwhile, Derrick accepts some money and more is promised if Angel gets additional jurors to vote for the plaintiff (Wood's widow).

Nicholas slips some drugs into Herman Grime's coffee. These temporarily knock Herman out and he is removed from the jury.

In his closing speech, Rohr puts the sum owed to Wood's family at two million dollars. He also mentions punitive damages noting that Pynex has \$800 million in cash. Meanwhile, Cable speaks of fairness. He says Wood had smoked for thirty-five years and now the family just wants money.

Marlee confirms receipt of ten million dollars from Fitch in her bank, notifies Nicholas, and leaves the country. In Grand Cayman, Marlee sells \$22 million Pynex shares with plans to buy them back the next day at a lower price.

Fitch hears about Marlee's background – both her parents died young of lung cancer. However, Fitch knows he cannot do anything to stop the jury's discussions.

Nicholas, who replaces Herman as foreman, emphasizes the importance of the jurors staying united. They all agree

that cigarettes cause lung cancer and nicotine is addictive. Lonnie sides with the tobacco companies saying that cigarettes are dangerous and that people who smoke suffer the consequences. Angel sides with the plaintiff, stating that she became addicted to cigarettes as a teenager.

Initially, in deciding if Pynex should be held responsible, four vote yes, four vote no and the others are not sure. Then Nicholas states his support for the plaintiff (Wood's widow) and the votes change. Nine of twelve jurors agree that the plaintiff should receive two million dollars in actual damages and four hundred million dollars in punitive damages from Pynex. Nicholas tells Lonnie he will have a chance to say he disagrees.

Fitch knows there is little he can do to stop Nicholas or Marlee. Nicholas gets escorted to the airport and joins Marlee. Marlee buys back the Pynex shares at a lower price and instantly makes eight million dollars.

Six weeks later, Marlee meets with Fitch and says she has returned the ten million dollars to his account. She discusses the death of her parents with him and tells him she will watch the appeal of this case. She warns Fitch that, if necessary, she has copies of bank transfers.

Background and themes

The power of major corporations: In America, large companies, especially tobacco companies, have a lot of influence. With immense amounts of profits from the sales of cigarettes, they spend millions of dollars advertising their products. They claim that smoking is a choice. They are not forcing anyone to smoke. These companies defend themselves in trials brought against them by the relatives of people who have died from lung cancer after smoking all their lives. In the book, they try to guarantee their victory in court by resorting to illegal methods.

The abuse of the American legal system: In any trial, but especially those where one side stands to win or lose vast amounts of money, the members of the jury are carefully vetted by both the defense and prosecution lawyers to ensure that the people selected will deliver the verdict they want. Once the jurors are selected, any potential problems with them are dealt with by the lawyers. In this book, jurors are seen to be bribed, tricked, even threatened so that they have no choice but to deliver the desired verdict.

Triumph for the little man: In this case, Marlee and Nicholas take on the giant corporations. Over many years



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they have planned how to beat the tobacco companies. They manage to keep their real intentions hidden from Fitch, who thinks they are on his side. At the end, they return the money that he has paid them, knowing that the loss of the case will do the tobacco companies irreparable damage.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Group work:** Have students work in small groups and discuss the following question:
Should people be allowed to smoke if they want to? Why or why not?
Have students share their ideas as a class. Then take a class poll. *How many are in favor of giving people the choice to smoke? How many are against it?*
- Pair work:** In pairs, have students look at the cover of the book. What could the pictures and symbols represent? Have students share their ideas.

Introduction

After reading

- Read carefully:** Have students answer these questions about John Grisham:
 - Where was John Grisham born?
 - How old was he when he wrote *A Time to Kill*?
 - Where did he go to university? What did he study?
 - What is the message in most of John Grisham's books?

Chapters 1–3

Before reading

- Group work:** In small groups, have students think about the role of a juror in a trial. What words describe the best kind of juror? Have students share their best five words with the class. They should be prepared to explain their choices.

After reading

- Pair work:** In pairs, have students discuss Nicholas Easter. Consider his actions. What words would they use to describe each action? Why do they think he does each action?

Action taken by Nicholas	Description of action	Explanation of action

Have students guess what role Nicholas might have in the novel. They write down their ideas and save these to look at again after completing the novel.

- Pair work:** Read the opening statements of Rohr and Cable as well as their descriptions on pages 7 and 9. In pairs, make notes on each.

	Rohr	Cable
Main lawyer for		
Appearance to others		
Main argument in case		

- Write:** Have students make a chart listing the jurors and information they have about each one.
- Read carefully:** In groups, answer these questions:
 - Why were the tobacco companies being attacked?
 - What is The Fund for?
 - Why did the plaintiff's lawyers choose the town of Biloxi to hold the trial?
 - When had Nicholas met Fitch before?
 - Who had hidden a secret camera in the courtroom? Why?
 - Who tells the jurors to stare at a woman in the courtroom? What do you think is the purpose of this?
 - Who thinks that people are stupid to smoke cigarettes and that they should give up smoking? What does Nicholas do when he hears this?

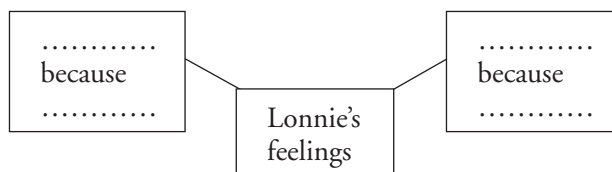
Chapters 4–6

After reading

- Group work:** In groups, have students discuss the way the following people try to influence others in the case. Have students fill out a chart.

Who?	Who does he/she try to influence?	How does he/she do this?
Fitch		
Rohr		
Marlee		
Nicholas		

- Pair work:** In pairs, have students discuss the different feelings Lonnie might have about his discussions at SuperHouse headquarters (pages 24–25) and with George Teaker (page 37). Why might he feel this way?



- Guess:** The judge requires the jurors to spend the next two weeks together in the motel. On page 31, it says that Nicholas was “delighted” with this but “managed to look depressed”. Have students guess why he might feel this way (delighted) and why he might act this way (depressed). Have them share their ideas in class.



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- 12 Write:** Have students imagine they are Hoppy Dupree. In pairs, have them write down the pros and cons of getting involved with K LX Property Group (see pages 35–37). Have them write their ideas in a chart.

Involvement with K LX Property Group	
Advantages ☺	Disadvantages ☹

Have them read pages 38–39. Do they think Hoppy made the right choice? Have students share their ideas in class.

Chapters 7–9

Before reading

- 13 Guess:** At the end of Chapter 6, Marlee tells Fitch she has talked with Rohr as well. Have students discuss why Marlee might tell Fitch about Rohr. What do they think she will do next? What will Fitch do next?

After reading

- 14 Discuss:** In groups, have students discuss the way that Fitch and his people try to learn more about Nicholas. Students should talk about what they feel about their methods. Then have students discuss the way Fitch and his people try to influence Millie Dupree through her husband, Hoppy. How do students feel about this?
- 15 Write:** Have students reread Robilio's testimony in court on pages 48–49. Have them write their response to his testimony. Consider the following questions:
- Should tobacco companies be allowed to advertise?
 - What (if anything) should be done to stop young people from smoking?
- 16 Read carefully:** Marlee tells Fitch four different verdicts that the jury can give. Have students list these four possible verdicts.

Chapters 10–12

Before reading

- 17 Discuss:** Have students list the types of arguments the defense could make (supporting the tobacco companies). Which of these arguments might be the most convincing to jurors?

After reading

- 18 Careful reading:** Have students discuss the following questions.
- Why are the CEOs of the four big tobacco companies so concerned about this trial (see pages 61–63)?
 - If the tobacco company lost this case, what effect could that have on:
 - the value of shares?
 - possible lawsuits in the next five years?
 - legal fees for handling each future case?
 - possible government action against the tobacco industry?

- 19 Role play:** Have students imagine the thoughts of a person who has attended court and has heard Jankle's testimony. What might that person tell a friend about what Jankle said in court?

Student A: You have listened to Jankle's testimony. How do you feel about what he has said, including his response to Rohr's questions.

Student B: You are a friend of Student A. What would you ask your friend about the court case? How do you feel about Jankle's arguments and your friend's response?

- 20 Group work:** In pairs, discuss the pressures facing Derrick and Angel as well as Hoppy and Millie. What do you think will happen next to each of them?
- 21 Pair work:** Have students discuss Nicholas's actions against Colonel Herrera. What does Nicholas do? Why does Nicholas do this? How do Rohr, Cable and Fitch feel about this and why? How does Herrera feel?

Chapters 13–15

Before reading

- 22 Guess:** Take a survey and have students decide whether they think the jurors will vote in favor of the plaintiff (Wood's widow) or the defense (the tobacco company) or whether another verdict is likely. (Nine of the 12 jurors must vote for one side for a decision to be final.)

After reading

- 23 Role play:** Have students imagine the conversation Millie and Nicholas would have when Millie was trying to decide whether she should stay on the jury.
- Student A:* You are Millie. Why might you feel that you should leave the jury?
- Student B:* You are Nicholas. Respond to Millie's concerns. How could you encourage her to stay on the jury?
- 24 Write:** Have students imagine they are Fitch and they have just finished their meeting with Marlee in New York (after the case is finished). What might they say to her in a letter? Have students write a letter from Fitch to Marlee that explains their feelings about what happened.
- 25 Write:** Have students imagine they are Marlee. Have them express their views about smoking in a letter to the editor of a local newspaper.

Vocabulary activities

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