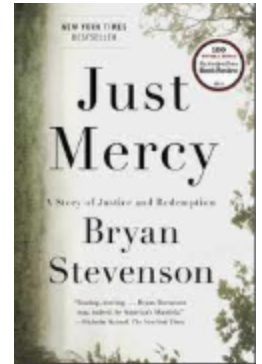


Just Mercy

By: Bryan Stevenson



Positive Learning Intention

- Building Understanding Through Closeness
- Finding hope during challenging times
- Observations of the justice system
- Advocacy

Cautionary Material

- Discussion of the Death Penalty and Crimes
- Profanity
- Mention of Sexual Abuse in the context of the Prison environment

Excerpts to contextualize cautionary material:

- “Proximity to execution alters you. You begin to understand the difference between what people deserve and what they need.” Stevenson discusses the flaws in capital punishment and the experiences of inmates who have faced execution.
- While the book itself does not excessively use profanity, it includes quotes from individuals who use strong language in emotional or high-stakes situations, such as courtroom exchanges or testimonies from inmates. “Don’t nobody care about us! We’re just niggers in a cage. They’re gonna kill me, and nobody’s gonna give a damn.” This quote contains profanity and strong language used to convey the inmate's desperation and anger at the injustice he faces, reflecting the emotional toll of the justice system on marginalized individuals.
- Stevenson highlights the case of Ian Manuel, who was placed in solitary confinement for years as a minor to protect him from adult prisoners. “Juveniles housed in adult prisons are five times more likely to be the victims of sexual assault, so the staff at Apalachee put Ian, who was small for his age, in solitary confinement.”

Excerpts that reflect learning intentions:

- Stevenson demonstrates understanding through closeness, “Often, the clients who are the most neglected and mistreated are the ones whose cries for help are the loudest. They are marginalized by their past mistakes, poverty, race, and disability. But when we get close to them, we begin to understand their humanity.”
- “Each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done.” Stevenson frequently uses this phrase throughout the book to emphasize redemption and the possibility of change, even for those who have been condemned by society.
- “The death penalty is not about whether people deserve to die for the crimes they commit. The real question is whether we deserve to kill.” Stevenson critiques the systemic flaws of the criminal justice system, particularly in how the death penalty is applied unfairly, often influenced by race, poverty, and inadequate legal representation. This quote highlights Stevenson’s broader observation that the justice system is not always about fairness or truth but can instead be driven by bias, politics, and a lack of

compassion.

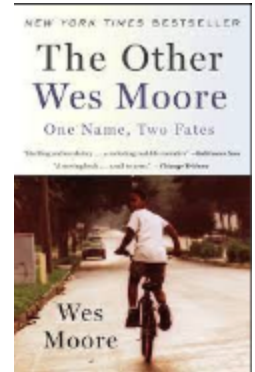
- “We need to change the narrative about race in this country. We need to talk about the injustices of the past in a way that changes the future.” Stevenson discusses the need for systemic change and his ongoing fight for criminal justice reform, particularly regarding racial injustice and mass incarceration. This quote reflects Stevenson’s role as an advocate, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging historical injustices and working toward a more just and equitable future.

Projects/Assignments that reflect learning intentions:

- **Research (law cases):** Students research a real-life case of wrongful conviction, systemic injustice, or criminal justice reform. They will then create an advocacy campaign that includes a research paper, a multimedia presentation (video, podcast, or website), and a call to action (letter to a representative, social media campaign, or awareness posters). **Standards Addressed: (W.11-12.7), (W.11-12.8), (SL.11-12.4).**
- **Podcast:** Students create a podcast episode analyzing a key theme from *Just Mercy*, such as racial injustice, redemption, or the death penalty. They must incorporate textual evidence, research, and real-world examples. Students will script, record, and edit their podcasts using an engaging format (e.g., interviews, narrative storytelling, or panel discussion). **Standards Addressed: (RI.11-12.3), (SL.11-12.6), (W.11-12.4).**
- **Mock Trial:** Students work in groups to reenact a trial scene inspired by *Just Mercy* or a historical case. They will take on roles such as defense attorneys, prosecutors, defendants, and judges. Each student must research legal precedents, write opening/closing arguments, and prepare questioning strategies. The class will then conduct the trial in a mock courtroom setting. **Standards Addressed: (SL.11-12.1), (SL.11-12.3), (W.11-12.1).**

The Other Wes Moore

By: Wes Moore



Positive Learning Intentions

- The impact of positive choices – Decisions shape one's future, as seen in the diverging paths of the two Wes Moores.
- The influence of environment and relationships – Surrounding oneself with positive role models and mentors can lead to success.

Cautionary Material

- **Criminal Justice System:** The book explores systemic issues, racial disparities, and how individuals navigate legal consequences based on their environment and choices.
- **Mention of Neighborhood Gangs/Criminal Activity:** The other Wes Moore becomes involved in drug dealing, leading to serious consequences. His story reflects the difficulties of escaping systemic cycles of poverty and violence.
- **Profanity:** Some dialogue and narrative elements include strong language, often used to accurately reflect real-life situations.

Excerpts to Contextualize Cautionary Material

- **On the Criminal Justice System:** “The chilling truth is that his story could have been mine. The tragedy is that my story could have been his.” This passage emphasizes the impact of choices and circumstances in determining life outcomes.
- **On Neighborhood Gangs and Criminal Activity:** “Wes wanted to be just like his big brother. Tony tried to keep Wes away from the streets, but in the end, Wes was drawn to what he saw every day.” This moment highlights how young people are influenced by their surroundings, even when warned against negative paths.

Excerpts that Reflect Learning Intentions

- **Making Positive Decisions:** “I realized that even in the toughest of times, discipline and structure could provide stability.” This highlights how the author’s time in military school helped him build a strong foundation for his future.
- **The Importance of Surrounding Yourself with Positive People:** “My mother had sent me away because she wanted to give me the best chance she could. It was a gamble, but one she was willing to take.” His mother’s decision to send him to military school altered the course of his life, showing how support systems play a crucial role.

Projects/Assignments That Reflect Learning Intentions

- **Personal Reflection Essay:** Students write about a time when they made a difficult decision and how it shaped their future.
 - Standard: W.11-12.3 (Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.)
- **Character Comparison Chart:** Students analyze the two Wes Moores’ lives, decisions, and external influences, noting key turning points.
 - **Standard:** RL.11-12.3 (Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how

to develop and relate elements of a story or drama.)

- **Debate or Discussion on Social Influences:** A structured debate on whether environment or personal choice plays a greater role in shaping one's future.
 - SL.11-12.1 (Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.)
- **Letter to a Mentor:** Students write a letter to someone who has positively influenced their life, reflecting on how mentorship and guidance shape success.
 - W.11-12.4 (Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.)
- **Alternative Endings Assignment:** Students rewrite key moments in the book where different choices could have led to different outcomes, emphasizing the impact of decisions.
 - W.11-12.3.B (Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.)

They Both Die at the End

By: Adam Silvera



Positive Learning Intention:

- Strong messages about the importance of forgiveness, redemption, and love
- Explores how family can extend beyond blood relations to include close friendships
- Demonstrates that a parent can (and should) also be a child's confidant and close friend

Cautionary Material:

- **Mention of Death/Near Death Experience:** The premise revolves around knowing one's final day, leading to emotional and existential reflections.
- **Kissing:** Romantic moments between characters.
- **Profanity:** Some strong language in dialogue.
- **Mention of Neighborhood Alcohol and Drug Use:** Some characters reference or discuss drug-related activity. Characters drink, including underage drinking in some scenes.

Excerpts to Contextualize Cautionary Material:

- **Mention of Death/Near Death Experience:** The book centers on the idea of living one's last day with intention and purpose, reflecting on mortality. *"I wasted all those yesterdays and am completely out of tomorrows."*
- **Kissing:** A meaningful moment between the protagonists, highlighting emotional connection rather than gratuitous content. *"I kiss him back like it's the first time I've ever kissed anyone because it's the first time I've ever kissed someone who matters."*
- **Profanity:** Strong language occurs naturally within dialogue but is not excessive. *"Screw it. I'm just living my best last day."*
- **Mention of Neighborhood Drug and Alcohol Use:** A character reflects on the environment he grew up in and his decision to make better choices. Underage drinking occasionally occurs, emphasizing a 'live for today' attitude in the context of the story's premise. *"There's this one drug dealer on my block who's always offering me a job."*
"We're not twenty-one yet, but I don't think that matters today."

Excerpts that Reflect Learning Intentions:

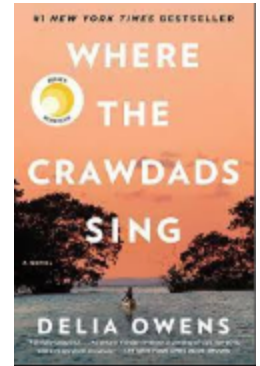
- **Forgiveness and Redemption:** The protagonists learn to be honest about their emotions, letting go of past regrets. *"We don't have to keep pretending we're okay."*
- **Love and Found Family:** The book emphasizes the power of connection, showing that deep bonds can form in even the shortest amount of time. *"Mateo and I may not have had much time, but we lived."*

- **Parent-Child Bond:** The story highlights the importance of communication and emotional openness in parent-child relationships. *“I wish I could call my dad and tell him I love him.”*

Projects/Assignments that Reflect Learning Intentions:

- **Personal Reflection Essay**
 - RL.11-12.1-6,10: Prompt: If you had 24 hours to live, how would you spend your day? How does *They Both Die at the End* challenge our understanding of time and relationships?
- **Character Analysis**
 - RI.11-12.1, 3 Activity: Analyze Mateo and Rufus’ emotional journeys. How do their perspectives on life and death evolve?
- **Forgiveness and Regret Discussion**
 - SL.11-12. 1-4, Activity: Students discuss characters' regrets and missed opportunities, connecting them to real-life situations where they have witnessed or experienced similar emotions.
- **Found Family Collage or Writing Project**
 - W.11-12.1-5, 8-10 Activity: Students create a collage or essay showcasing what ‘family’ means to them, inspired by the book’s depiction of close friendships and chosen family.

Where the Crawdads Sings By: Delia Owens



Positive Learning Intentions

- Explores the importance of nature, self-education, and being a lifelong learner.
- Depicts the many reasons people need companionship and love, emphasizing the contrast between human connection and loneliness.
- Examines the lasting impact of trauma and abandonment, highlighting the loneliness of isolation and the ways people cope with deep emotional wounds.
- Themes include empathy, perseverance, and resilience, as seen through Kya's struggles and triumphs.

Cautionary Material

- **Unsolved Murder:** The novel revolves around the mysterious death of Chase Andrews, which remains a central plot point.
- **Domestic Violence:** Kya's mother is physically abused by her father, leading her to flee, and Kya later faces controlling behavior from Chase.
- **Sexual Content (non-graphic):** There are romantic and intimate moments, but they are not explicit.
- **Attempted Sexual Assault (non-graphic):** Chase attempts to assault Kya, leading to her strong reaction of self-defense.

Excerpts to Contextualize Cautionary Material

- **Unsolved Murder (Mystery Element):** The unsolved murder of Chase Andrews serves as a central mystery, with Kya Clark, the misunderstood "Marsh Girl," as the prime suspect due to the town's deep-seated prejudices. Rather than focusing on violence, the novel uses the murder to explore themes of isolation, societal bias, and the search for justice. *"He knew that marsh mud sucked things down, deep, and they stayed hidden forever."*
- **Sexual Content (non-graphic):** The sexual content is mostly implied rather than overt. While the novel includes romantic and intimate moments, they are not graphic or explicit. The scenes focus more on emotions, relationships, and Kya's personal growth rather than detailed descriptions of sexual encounters.
- **Domestic Violence:** Domestic violence is depicted through Kya's abusive father, whose cruelty drives her family away and forces her to survive alone in the marsh. This portrayal highlights the cycle of trauma, resilience, and the impact of isolation on a child's development. *"Her father wasn't always mean, but the whiskey made him so. He had never once hit her, but she had watched him do it to Ma."*
- **Attempted Sexual Assault:** Attempted sexual assault occurs when Chase Andrews, despite his past relationship with Kya, tries to force himself on her, reinforcing his sense of entitlement and power. This moment underscores themes of control, vulnerability, and Kya's determination to protect herself in a world that continually seeks to exploit her. *"He slammed her against the wall and ripped open her shirt. His weight pinned her down as she clawed at his face, kicking wildly."*

Excerpts That Reflect Learning Intentions

- Kya's survival and intellectual growth are shaped by nature, which becomes both her refuge and her teacher as she learns through keen observation of the marsh's ecosystems. With Tate's help, she discovers the power of reading and self-education, ultimately proving that curiosity and resilience can lead to profound knowledge outside of traditional schooling. *"Reading filled her head with knowledge, and she realized she could be something more than the girl they left behind."*
- Kya experiences deep loneliness due to her abandonment, finding solace in nature while yearning for human connection. Her relationships with Tate and Chase highlight this contrast—one offering genuine love and intellectual growth, the other reinforcing betrayal and isolation, ultimately shaping her understanding of trust and survival. *"Tate had given her something precious: words. And she learned to keep them close, to treasure them like the sea treasures a shell."*
- Kya's perseverance is evident as she survives years of abandonment and hardship in the marsh, relying on her resourcefulness and inner strength to overcome adversity. Her ability to endure, despite overwhelming isolation and prejudice, illustrates the power of resilience in the face of life's toughest challenges. *"She knew she had to make it on her own, just as the herons and fireflies did."*
- 1. Kya's deep empathy for the creatures and environment around her allows her to form a profound connection to the world, despite her isolation. This bond with nature and her capacity to understand others' struggles, like Tate's, reveal the importance of empathy in fostering meaningful relationships and understanding. *"Kya could never be completely alone because she had the marsh, the gulls, the quiet lapping of the waves."*

Projects/Assignments That Reflect Learning Intentions

- **Comparative Literature Study** – Compare *Where the Crawdads Sing* with another novel that explores isolation and survival, such as *The Scarlet Letter* or *The Call of the Wild*.
 - RL.11-12.2: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
 - SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- **Mock Trial Activity** – Students participate in a mock trial, debating Kya's guilt or innocence based on the evidence presented in the book:
 - W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
 - W.11-12.9: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- **Theme Analysis Presentation** – Small groups present on themes like loneliness, survival, and the human connection to nature, using textual evidence.
 - W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.