

Ideas and activities for exploring the Theodore Boone series by John Grisham with students in Years 6-8 (P6, P7 and S1)

How to use the Theodore Boone Files and other materials

Before the students read the first book, Theodore Boone, give them the first section of **The Theodore Boone Files: Introducing Theo** and **The World of Theodore Boone: Legal Briefing**. Discuss what they already know about the US court and police system from TV and films.

As they read more of the books, give them **The Theodore Boone Files 2 and 3**, and allow time for them to gather together everything they have learned about Theo and create a display of their findings.

The **talking points** and activities can be used as students progress through the books in various school settings including reading groups, breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and tutor groups, as well as English and Citizenship lessons.

Theo in transition

The Theodore Boone books are an ideal basis for a school library reading project that bridges the gap between primary and secondary school. They can be introduced in the last term of primary school with students taking the summer to read the books. **The Theodore Boone Files 2: Background** can be used at the end of primary school to help prepare for the changes ahead in the move to secondary. In the first few weeks of secondary school, students could do **The Courtroom Hero Quiz** and move on to the **Theo in Depth** discussion and the activities that relate to their most popular book.

Exploring the world of Theodore Boone

General activities

(These can be used with all or any of the books)

1. Does the punishment fit the crime?

Collect crime news reports, separate the details of the sentences from the reports and ask students to match up crimes with the sentences they might expect the guilty person to be given.

2. Animal Court

Ask students to discuss why John Grisham includes scenes from Animal Court in the books.

How does Judge Yeck handle complaints? How does he behave differently to Judge Gantry?

Is it the animals or their owners who are the problem?

- Ask students to create more cases for Animal Court. What is the most bizarre complaint that might be brought against an animal? They can invent them or collect ideas from family and friends or from news reports.
- Role-play the Animal Court cases with students playing the animal owners, the people with complaints against them and the judge.
- If time/resources allow, write and perform scenes from Animal Court.

3. We can be heroes

Theo is an example of a young person who wants to make a difference in the world and is not waiting for adults to lead the way. Ask students to research other young people of around Theo's age who are doing this. Choose some from your community and some from around the world. Create a display of your findings in a Young Heroes' Gallery and/or prepare an assembly presentation on this.

Plus:

The Courtroom Hero Quiz (at theodoreboone.co.uk)

Introduce this when most students have read at least two of the books. The questions can be answered without having read the books if students know the legal points involved.

Theodore Boone activities

As well as providing an introduction to Theo's world and his daily life as a lawyer-in-waiting, *Theodore Boone* focuses on a murder trial. It's useful to read **Legal Briefing** and **Introducing Theo** before students start the book, with the **Background** resource introduced after they have finished the book.

- While students are reading *Theodore Boone*, set up a courtroom debate: who believes Pete Duffy is innocent and who believes he is guilty? Repeat the debate when they have finished the book.
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is another famous book that focuses on a trial that the whole town is talking about. Suggest that students compare the two books. What is similar about the way the court works and what is different? Is Tom Robinson, the accused man in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, treated as fairly as Pete Duffy?
- *Theodore Boone* also introduces the Highland Street Shelter for homeless people where all the Boones volunteer. Through a family from El Salvador living at the shelter, Theo meets a key witness who is living in the US illegally. Discuss:

1. Research how many families in the US and the UK are in the position of Theo's friends/informers. What does this mean for them?
2. Is Theo's family's role at the shelter a surprise? What does it tell students about his parents?

The Abduction activities

When Theo's friend April appears to have been kidnapped, the police make an arrest quickly but they have the wrong man. With help from his uncle Ike, Theo is determined to succeed where the police have failed.

Talking points

- Why the first person arrested for the kidnapping seems an obvious culprit.
- What Theo thinks of the police and what they think of him. Why might he be a problem for adults whose job it is to solve crimes?
- Theo disapproves of April's parents. What is his evidence for this? How do April's parents compare with Theo's parents?
- Why does Theo turn to Ike for help rather than his parents?

Towards the end of the book, introduce the **Background** resource and encourage students to pick out all the new information they have about Theo's home town.

The Accused activities

Thanks to mysterious enemies, Theo is wrongly accused of a crime and realises who his true friends are.

Talking points: who's got Theo's back?

- List everyone who has reason to dislike Theo or hold a grudge against him, both in this book and the earlier titles. Is it likely that he will continue to make enemies, and how might he deal with this?
- Theo often decides to keep things secret from his parents. In this book, why does he not get more support from his parents? Are there points when he would like to confide in them?
- Who turns against Theo when things go wrong for him, and who supports him? Are any of his supporters surprising?

The Activist activities

Theo and his friends take on the developer behind a controversial bypass project which is dividing the town: even Theo's lawyer parents disagree. When Theo uncovers the political corruption behind the scheme, he is forced to make some tough moral choices.

Find more young activists

- *The Activist* explains in detail how local government politics work in the US: find out how UK procedure is similar and different.
- Find examples of young people near home and around the world who have campaigned to change something in their community. Display your findings.
- Ask students to identify something in their community that they would like to change and work out how they could do it.

