

An argument workshop

A 45 minute activity after viewing Sidney Lumet's 1957 film.

Prepare the discussion

Print **student pages 1–3**. Students need prior viewing or their own viewing notes; screening time is additional. Cue the knife discussion and the late glasses discussion in your classroom copy if you will revisit them.

The film concerns murder, threatened execution and prejudice. Choose it with your class in mind. This activity examines the film's arguments, rather than prescribing real jury procedure. Students need not agree about the defendant's innocence.

A 45 minute sequence

Minutes	Activity
0–5	Define observation, claim, inference and alternative explanation.
5–10	Sort the three statements on page 1; compare labels.
10–20	Pairs reconstruct the knife argument across pages 1–2. Identify its hidden assumption.
20–30	Trace the eyesight chain on page 2. Test an alternative on page 3.
30–40	Discuss pressure on the jury and a choice in the filmmaking.
40–45	Write the exit ticket on page 3.

The knife argument

The intended labels are **C, I, O**. The shopkeeper's identification is reported; students do not witness the sale. Producing the second knife is visible in the jury room. The layers matter more than the letters.

"Must" overstates what resemblance establishes. Matching appearance suggests a connection, not a particular user. The second knife challenges uniqueness; it neither identifies the murderer nor rules out the defendant. [1]

ASK THE CLASS

If an explanation is possible, is it therefore established? Name information that could distinguish the competing accounts.



Discuss the gap

The eyesight argument

Separate the remembered marks, the inference about glasses, and the inference about visibility. Ask about the witness's vision, the conditions and what she recognised. The jurors have not directly established all these things. [1]

Mistaken identification without deliberate lying is one possible alternative. Ask what would support it. An invented possibility does not become a fact because it favours the defendant.

Prejudice and persuasion

Accept different moments when the action is accurately described. Separate the action from an account of a juror's motive. Bias can expose a weak argument without independently settling the case.

ONE SHOT TWO JOBS

Recall a close-up, reaction or movement. What does it invite you to feel? Does that feeling add information, or change how you receive an argument?



Read exit tickets for these four things

Evidence: a concrete example and its speaker or observer.

Assumption: the link from information to a conclusion.

Alternative: a possibility to examine.

Limit: something the argument or verdict leaves unresolved.

Reward reasoned revision. A student can replace “proves” or “definitely” with a more precise statement and explain why. The final “not guilty” verdict does not establish a complete account of the murder; Rosenbaum also stresses that Juror 8 does not know whether the defendant is innocent. [2]

Sources and classroom use

1 [AFI Catalog — 12 Angry Men \(1957\), synopsis](#)

2 [Thane Rosenbaum — Lumet's Faces, Criterion \(2011\)](#)

Original activities by Monocurator, September 2026. Free to print and adapt this kit, including Momo, for your classes. Keep the Monocurator link. Film access and screening permission are separate.