

Serial: The Case of Adnan Syed

AN OVERVIEW:

A high-school senior named Hae Min Lee disappeared one day after school in 1999, in Baltimore County, Maryland. A month later, her body was found in a city park. She'd been strangled. Her 17-year-old ex-boyfriend, Adnan Syed, was arrested for the crime, and within a year, he was sentenced to life in prison. The case against him was largely based on the story of one witness, Adnan's friend Jay, who testified that he helped Adnan bury Hae's body. But Adnan has always maintained he had nothing to do with Hae's death. Some people believe he's telling the truth. Many others don't.

Sarah Koenig (our narrator) sorted through thousands of documents, listened to trial testimony and police interrogations, and talked to everyone she could find who remembered what happened between Adnan Syed and Hae Min Lee. She discovered that the trial covered up a far more complicated story than the jury - or the public - ever got to hear. The high school scene, the shifting statements to police, the prejudices, the sketchy alibis, the scant forensic evidence -- all of it leads back to the most basic questions: How can you know a person's character? How can you tell what they're capable of?

*From the *Serial* Website

During *Serial*, we will hone our listening, evaluating, and analyzing skills as we engage with the convoluted investigation and conviction of Adnan Syed. This unit requires us to authentically evaluate a case from all angles. We must thoroughly investigate all available sources so that we may discern the truth for ourselves. This is of utmost importance as this unit culminates with a debate wherein we will be presenting our cases for Adnan's innocence or guilt.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. How can we evaluate a person's "single story"?
 - a. Why is it important to investigate multiple perspectives of the same story?
 - b. How does bias influence our perception of others?
 - c. How do we reconcile and synthesize multiple versions of the "same" story?
2. How can you determine a person's true character? Their true identity?
 - a. How is one shaped by their upbringing? To what extent is a person's actions determined by nature vs. nurture?
 - b. To what extent are we victims of our own personalities / decisions? To what extent can we (and should we) take responsibility for our actions?
3. What is moral ambiguity? How does one come to their own objective truth about morality? Is that possible?
 - a. How does one justify revenge? (Is revenge ever justified?) Can one sympathize with someone seeking revenge?
 - b. How does one synthesize "multiple truths" into one "objective" truth? Is that possible?
4. How do we discern "guilty" from "innocent"? How do we define "justice"?
 - a. How are these discernments and definitions shaped by our biases, perceptions, upbringings, society, etc.?
 - b. Would you rather let a guilty man go free, or an innocent man stay in jail?

KEY FACTS:

- *Serial* is narrated by Sarah Koenig and is published by *This American Life*
- *Serial* aired in 2014 and won a Peabody Award in 2015 for “its innovative telling of a long-form nonfiction story”
 - The podcast has been downloaded over 80 million times (according to the Washington Post)
- This a TRUE story
 - Setting: Baltimore, Maryland 1999
 - Woodlawn High School
 - Best Buy
 - Leakin Park
 - Implications - be respectful to and conscientious of these individuals. They are human. Treat them with decency and humanity.
- The Facts of the Case:
 - Jan. 13, 1999: Hae went missing after school
 - Feb. 9, 1999: Hae’s body was found
 - Feb. 28, 1999: Adnan was arrested
 - Dec. 8 1999 - Dec. 15 1999: Adnan’s first trial that ends in a mistrial
 - Jan. 10 2000 - Feb. 25 2000: Adnan’s second trial
- Adnan was convicted of first degree murder and has remained in prison since his June 2000 sentencing
 - He has recently attempted to overturn his sentence, but in March 2019 Maryland’s highest court, the Court of Appeals, denied a new trial

THOSE INVOLVED IN THE CASE:

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| ● Adnan Syed | ● Don (Hae’s boyfriend at time of murder) |
| ● Rabia Chaudry (friend of Syed family) | ● Aisha Pittman (friend of Hae’s) |
| ● Cristina Gutierrez (Adnan’s attorney) | ● Debbie Warren (friend of Hae’s) |
| ● Bill Ritz & Greg MacGillivray (detectives) | ● Krista Myers (friend of Adnan & Hae) |
| ● Kevin Urick (prosecutor) | ● “Cathy” (a friend of Jenn’s) |
| ● Hae Min Lee | ● Saad Chaudry (Adnan’s best friend) |
| ● Jay Wilds | ● Asia McClain (student at Woodlawn) |
| ● Jenn Pusateri (friend of Jay) | ● Nisha (friend of Adnan’s) |
| ● Stephanie McPherson (Jay’s girlfriend at the time, and a close friend of Adnan’s) | ● Yasser Ali (friend of Adnan’s) |
| | ● Mr. S (found Hae’s body) |

YOUR TASK:

1. Actively listen to each episode (majority of listening in class, responsible for some outside listening)
 - a. Discern the “truth” for yourself!
2. Active annotations that evaluate the credibility and reliability of the information presented:
 - a. Notes on facts and evidence towards Adnan’s guilt or innocence
 - b. Notes on Adnan’s character as an individual
 - c. Notes on the conflicts and inconsistencies present within the case
3. Complete essential vocabulary (in Google Classroom)
4. End Products: Socratic Dialogue & a Formal Debate