The law and justice rising 11th graders should read the book *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson and to answer the questions I've posted in Edmodo over the summer before school starts.

1) *Just Mercy* begins with information about Bryan Stevenson growing up poor in a racially segregated community in Delaware. He remembers his grandmother telling him, “You can’t understand most of the important things from a distance, Bryan. You have to get close” (14). How does Stevenson get close to the incarcerated people he is helping? How does getting close to Walter McMillian affect Stevenson’s life? Can you be an effective criminal lawyer without getting close?

2) Early in the book, Stevenson describes an incident when he was racially profiled and the police searched his car. He wonders, if there had been drugs in his car and he was arrested, would he have been able to convince his attorney that his car was searched illegally? Stevenson says, “Would a judge believe that I’d done nothing wrong? Would they believe someone who was just like me but happened not to be a lawyer? Someone like me who was unemployed and had a criminal record?” (44). How does Stevenson’s work shape his understanding of the justice system? Do his experiences make him more or less empathetic to those in the justice system? Is it surprising that someone whose 86-year-old grandfather was murdered would work so tirelessly against the death penalty?

3) As a result of his extensive work with low income and incarcerated people, Stevenson concludes that “the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice” (18). What does this statement mean? What examples in the book inform Stevenson’s position on poverty and justice? What is justice? What does ‘Just Mercy’ mean?

4) Examine Ralph Meyers testimony on page 169 for an example and how poverty impacts justice. If you were the lawyer for the defendant McMillian what facts would you want to communicate to the judge that would mitigate the situation?

5) Stevenson describes numerous workarounds within the United States legal system. We learn that nearly every prisoner on death row had been tried by an all-white or nearly all-white jury, despite a Supreme Court ruling in the 19th century that declared excluding black people from jury duty unconstitutional. Why do you think black people are excluded from juries of black defendants? What factors should influence jury selection?

6) Stevenson provides examples of defendants whose mental illness is never mentioned at trial. Why do you think mental illness often goes unaddressed at trial? Should it be considered? If so, what are fair ways to try/treat individuals with mental health issues?
What is our responsibility to people with mental health issues when these individuals become involved in the justice system?

7) Check out the website Prison Policy Initiative, a non-partisan organization. Traditionally, the main role of jails was to confine people who have been convicted of minor crimes. However, national jail growth is driven by the rise in pre-trial detention and in the holding of people for other agencies what are the main reasons for this growth? Read and explore this link and describe what are some of the main causes of mass incarceration rates?
   https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/actually_driving_jail_growth.html

8) The United States’ use of the death penalty differs from other countries’ use. For instance, Germany abolished the death penalty after the Holocaust. In India, where the death penalty is legal, only a handful of criminals have been executed since the turn of the century. What do you know about other countries and their position on and enforcement of capital punishment? How might politics, religion, culture and/or history play a role?

9) The New York Times says Just Mercy “reads like a call to action.” Stevenson calls for increasing the salaries of teachers, law enforcement, and social workers in an interview with National Public Radio. Are you compelled to take action after reading the book? If so, what would that look like? Are there local or national groups that you would work with to make your action more powerful? (For more information on local and national groups, please see the “Call to Action” section of the UW-Madison Libraries’ Just Mercy: Go Big Read Research Guide (http://researchguides.library.wisc.edu/justmercy.).