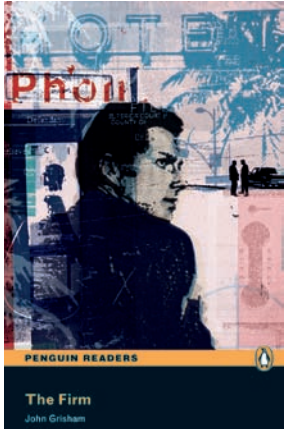




# The Firm

John Grisham



## About the author

John Grisham's novels have made him one of the richest men in the entertainment business. *The Firm*, which was published in 1991, was his first big success and sold over twelve million copies in paperback in the United States alone. Its success enabled him to shift his focus from law to full-time writing. In the years to follow, Grisham produced at least a novel a year, most of which became bestsellers. *Publishers Weekly* named Grisham 'the bestselling novelist of the 90s'. He is said to earn well over US\$25 million a year from his books and film rights. Many of his books, including *The Firm*, have been made into successful films.

One of the secrets of Grisham's success is his much-acclaimed ability as a storyteller. He also owes much of his success to his detailed knowledge of the law and the criminal world, which he gained by practising law for several years in Southaven, Mississippi. Like the hero in *The Firm*, Mitch McDeere, Grisham was born in the southern part of the United States – in Grisham's case, in Arkansas – where he worked his way up from poverty to become a lawyer.

There is a strong element of social criticism in Grisham's thrillers. He served in local government in Mississippi as a Democrat from 1983 to 1991, where he hoped to improve the state's education system, but he eventually resigned his seat because he felt that it was impossible to make changes. He is a born-again Christian who attends a Baptist church every Sunday. He also teaches classes and baseball at Sunday school, and he works with overseas orphans. In almost all of his stories, a lone (often young) figure fights for justice against the corruption of large state institutions or criminal gangs, such as the Mafia and the Ku Klux Klan.

## Summary

*The Firm* tells the story of a brilliant young lawyer, Mitch McDeere. Before he has even left law school, Mitch is offered \$80,000 a year in the job of his dreams, and even though the firm of Bendini, Lambert & Locke seems peculiarly strict and conservative, Mitch moves with his young wife to Memphis, Tennessee to take up the job. However, the firm turns out to be even stranger than Mitch thought. Not only is it obsessively secretive, but its lawyers keep dying! When Mitch is contacted by the FBI, he learns the real truth about the firm, and he begins to realize that he is in danger.

**Chapters 1–5:** The story starts with Mitch McDeere, a young ambitious lawyer, getting ready to graduate from Harvard Law School. He is offered jobs by a few law firms, but he is ultimately won over by a law firm in Memphis, Tennessee – Bendini, Lambert & Locke. Mitch and his wife, Abby, fly to Memphis, where Mitch gets a tour of the firm. By the end of his meeting with Lamar Quin, a senior member, he knows that Bendini, Lambert & Locke is the place for him.

Meanwhile, another senior member of the firm, Oliver Lambert, and the head of the firm's security, DeVasher, meet in secrecy to discuss Mitch and whether or not he is a threat to the firm's security. The men listen to tapes of Mitch and his wife talking on the phone, and then they talk about Mitch's brother, Ray, whom they have been unable to locate. Finally, they talk about two other members of the firm, and how they might need to kill them, as well as an FBI agent, who is investigating the firm. Not knowing the dark truth about the firm, Mitch and his wife move to Memphis, where they buy a house and settle into their new life in the south. One evening, they go to the Quins' house for dinner, and they discover that two members of the firm – Marty Kozinski and Joe Hodge – were killed in a boating accident in the Cayman Islands. After attending the men's funeral, Mitch starts working at the firm, spending a hundred hours a week at the office. He is keen to become the best lawyer the firm has ever had.

**Chapters 6–10:** DeVasher sends some of his men to Mitch and Abby's house to hide several bugs in the rooms so that he can record their conversations. Mitch eventually discovers that five of the firm's lawyers have died in the past fifteen years. One day, while Mitch is eating lunch, an FBI agent, Wayne Tarrance, approaches him and tells him that the lawyers' deaths weren't accidental, and that



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he should be very careful. Mitch tells Lambert, who tells him to stay away from Tarrance. Mitch ends up hiring a private investigator, Eddie Lomax, who agrees to look into the firm for him. A week later, Mitch and Avery fly to the Cayman Islands to do some tax work for a client. Later that night, after drinking in a bar, Mitch goes for a walk on the beach and meets a mysterious woman, who seduces him. They make love in the sand, and from the darkness, someone takes photos of the pair. The photos end up with DeVasher. Meanwhile, Mitch meets with Lomax, who tells him that the lawyers' deaths were likely not accidents. Finally, Mitch shares the bad news with Abby.

**Chapters 11–15:** After Lomax is murdered by a professional killer, his secretary meets with Mitch, and they decide to keep in touch with each other. Mitch flies to Washington for a tax conference, where he meets with the head of the FBI, a man named F. Denton Voyles, who tells him that the firm is owned by the Mafia, and that no lawyer ever leaves the firm alive. Voyles asks Mitch to gather some evidence against the firm, and then promises to protect him and Abby after the FBI makes its move against the firm and its criminal partners. Shortly after, Mitch is approached by DeVasher, who shows him the photos that were taken on the beach in the Cayman Islands. DeVasher threatens to send the photos to his wife. Mitch responds by helping the FBI to gather evidence against the firm – in exchange for two million dollars and the release of his brother from prison.

**Chapters 16–20:** Abby pretends to leave Mitch and visit her mother, who is ill, but instead she flies to the Cayman Islands with Tammy, Lomax's secretary, who helps her to copy several files in Avery's room. However, in the morning, as the women are talking on the phone, a recorder tapes their conversation. Meanwhile, a member of the Mafia family that owns the firm pays an FBI agent to find out if Mitch is indeed selling files to the agency as the partners suspect. After collecting more evidence from Mitch, Abby and Tammy, the FBI helps Ray to escape from prison, as per their agreement. However, a dirty FBI agent tells the Mafia family that Mitch is selling documents to them, and Voyles shares this news with Mitch, who decides to make a run for it. He tells Abby and Tammy to run too.

**Chapters 21–25:** Mitch, Abby and Tammy go on the run, and Ray helps to protect Abby from a hired killer. The FBI and the Mafia do everything within their power

to find them, but the four always manage to stay one step ahead of their pursuers. Eventually, Mitch makes some videotapes explaining exactly how the Mafia uses the firm to commit crimes. Later that night, Mitch, Abby and Ray escape in a boat, and in the morning, Tammy phones Tarrance and tells him that he can pick up the rest of the files in a hotel room. Mitch, Abby and Ray fly to the Cayman Islands to start their new life in hiding. Meanwhile, back in the United States, fifty-one members of the firm – past and present – are arrested by the FBI, along with several Mafia members. Thanks to Mitch and his companions, the firm is finished.

### Background and themes

**Ordinary heroes:** Grisham's stories have a consistent theme that appeals to many people nowadays: his heroes are ordinary people who fight the faceless, powerful institutions of society – and win! Three large institutions are featured in *The Firm*: the Mafia, the FBI and high-powered lawyers. They want different things from Mitch, but they share a common trait – they are powerful, and they can break the law in the defence of their power. In Grisham's books, the 'enemy' can be a government agency, such as the FBI or the CIA, a powerful company or a criminal group, such as the Mafia or the Ku Klux Klan. His heroes are equally diverse, and can be found almost anywhere.

**The love-hate relationship with lawyers:** Americans are both fascinated and appalled by their lawyers. They sue each other more frequently than any other nation in the world, and they are so interested in the procedures of law that there is a TV channel that covers nothing but court cases. However, lawyers are mistrusted for their high fees, and 'lawyer jokes' are so common among the public that there is a phone line in California that specializes in them. Grisham's criminal law firm of Bendini, Lambert & Locke, with its cynically high charges and money-driven culture, cleverly plays to his countrymen's worst fears about the legal profession.

**The long reach of the Mafia:** The criminal society of the Mafia spread to the United States from Sicily in the late nineteenth century. There are several Mafia families in the country, each with its own head or 'don'. Non-relatives can also join if they are trusted. The Mafia is enormously rich and powerful, and its influence reaches into almost all areas of American business, and beyond. At times in its history, the Mafia has even controlled government



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officials. It makes billions of dollars from gambling, prostitution and drug trafficking, and invests this money in legal businesses, through which it makes even more profit. Grisham's central idea of a law firm that is secretly owned by the Mafia isn't in the least farfetched.

**The power of the FBI:** The FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) exists to combat criminals and criminal organisations whose activities affect the whole of the United States. The investigation of crime syndicates like the Mafia is one of the FBI's most important tasks. It has more than fifty million fingerprints on record, as well as files on more than one hundred million Americans.

### Discussion activities

#### Chapters 1–5, pages 1–11

##### Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask students if they have ever seen the film version of *The Firm*. *Did you like the film? Why or why not? Do you remember the story in the film?* Get students to recount the story as completely as possible, and write notes on the board to record what the story is about.
- Discuss:** Write the following words on the board and discuss their meanings as a class: *agent, bug, client, explosion, evil, firm, lawyer, lever, partner, poverty, rich* and *secrecy*. Divide the class into two teams. Give each student on each team a letter (A, B, C, etc). Student A from the first team should give a meaning of one of the words without saying the word. Student A from the second team should guess which word the other student is referring to. Award one point for giving the correct meaning and one point for guessing the correct word. For the next round, Student B from the second team should give a definition of another word, and then Student B from the first team should guess the word (and so on). After all the words have been defined and guessed correctly, total up the points for each team – the team with the most points wins.
- Research:** Ask students to bring information about the Mafia to class. Put a large piece of paper on the wall and get students to attach their information to the piece of paper to make a wall display.

##### After reading

- Discuss:** Ask students to give their opinions about lawyers and the amount of money that they earn (especially in America). *Do you think that it is right or wrong for lawyers to earn so much money? Give reasons to support your answer. Do you think that the firm of Bendini, Lambert & Locke is typical in billing clients for more hours than they actually work? Do you think the firm is right or wrong to do this? Give reasons to support your answer.* Get students to think about the time it

takes to qualify as a lawyer, the long hours they work and the short holidays they get. *Would you like to be a lawyer? Why/why not?*

- Role play:** Put students into pairs. Student A is Mitch and Student B is Abby. Mitch has just got home from work, too late for dinner after Abby has spent a long time preparing the meal. Abby should ask Mitch why he always comes home so late, and Mitch should give her an explanation. Then Abby should tell Mitch how she feels when he comes home too late for dinner, and what she wants him to do to fix the situation. Mitch should explain why he is working so hard and what he wants their future to look like. Abby should listen to Mitch's explanation and plans for the future and then explain what she wants their future to look like.

#### Chapters 6–10, pages 11–28

##### Before reading

- Guess:** Ask students to predict what will happen to Mitch, Abby and the other characters in Chapters 6 to 10.
- Research:** Put students into small groups and get them to look for information about the FBI in the library, on the Internet, etc. Then get them to make a brochure to promote the agency for new recruits. When they have finished, the groups should stand at the front of the classroom and present their brochure to the rest of the class.
- Research:** Put students into pairs and get them to look up the word *privacy* in a dictionary or on the Internet. Make the exercise into a competition – the first pair of students to find the definition wins. They should stand up and read the definition out loud to the rest of the class. Finally, they should use the word in a sentence as an example.
- Research:** Put students into small groups and get them to look for information about the Cayman Islands in the library, on the Internet, etc. Then get them to make a brochure to promote the islands as a tourist destination. When they have finished, the groups should stand at the front of the classroom and present their brochure to the rest of the class.

##### After reading

- Check:** Check if the predictions that students made in activity 6 were right or wrong.
- Pair work:** Put students into pairs and get them to discuss whether it is a good idea or a bad idea for Mitch to tell the partners about being contacted by Tarrance. They should give reasons to support their opinion. Then they should pretend that Mitch chooses to tell Abby instead of the partners, and imagine what her reaction and advice will be.
- Pair work:** Write the following list of words and phrases on the board. Then draw the following table underneath it. Finally, put students into pairs and get them to divide the list of words and phrases into the relevant columns of the table.



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agent	drives a BMW
forty years old	from New York
goes to Grand Cayman	lawyer
makes love on a beach	Ray's brother
the new man at the firm	wants to be rich
Wayne	wears a cheap suit

Mitch	Tarrance

- 13 Write:** Do you think Tarrance really wants to help Mitch? Why/why not? Get students to write a sentence to answer these questions.
- 14 Artwork:** Put students into pairs and get them to draw a picture of one of the characters in Chapters 5 to 10. Note that each student should draw his or her own picture. When they have finished, the pairs should take turns looking at each other's picture. Then each student should guess which character his or her partner's picture illustrates.
- 15 Discuss:** Put students into small groups and get them to write the names of the characters that have appeared in the book so far on small cards. The groups should write brief descriptions of the characters on other small cards and then exchange their collection of descriptions with another group. Finally, they should try to match the other group's descriptions with their collection of character names. When they have finished, the groups should stand at the front of the class and read each name and matching description to their classmates. For each character and description, take a vote to see if their classmates agree with their choice.

### Chapters 11–15, pages 28–43

#### Before reading

- 16 Discuss:** Ask students to think about why Chapter 11 is called *A Professional Job*. *Who do you think does a professional job in the chapter? Why do you think this? What kind of job do you think the person does? Why do you think this? Do you like the title of the chapter? Why or why not? Does the title make you want to read the chapter? Why/why not?*
- 17 Pair work:** Put students into pairs and get them to discuss the following questions:  
*Do you think the five lawyers died accidentally, as the firm says? Or do you think they were killed, as Tarrance says? Why do you think this?*  
*Do you think Lomax will be able to help Mitch? If so, how will he be able to help him? If not, why won't he be able to help him?*

*Why do you think DeVasher paid someone to take photos of Mitch and the woman on the beach? What do you think DeVasher plans to do with the photos? Why do you think this?*

*Do you think Abby will see the photos? If so, how do you think they will make her feel? If not, why do you think she won't see them?*

#### After reading

- 18 Artwork:** Get students to draw a picture to describe the scene from Chapters 11 to 15. When they have finished, they should stand at the front of the classroom and describe their picture to the rest of the class. The class should draw the picture as it is being described and then compare the pictures.
- 19 Discuss:** Ask students if they have ever seen a film version of a different Grisham novel (*A Time to Kill*, *The Client*, *The Pelican Brief*, *The Rainmaker*, etc). *Did you like the film? Why or why not? Do you remember the story in the film? If so, what happens in the film?* Get students to recount as many of the stories as possible, and write notes on the board to record what each of the stories is about. Then get them to compare each of the stories to the one in *The Firm*. *How are the stories similar? How are they different?*
- 20 Discuss:** Put students into small groups and get them to discuss why Mitch shouts at Tarrance and pushes him away outside the shoe shop. One member of the group should make notes to record the reasons that the group comes up with. When they have finished, the groups should stand at the front of the class and read the notes to their classmates.
- 21 Pair work:** Put students into pairs and get them to write three questions that they have regarding Chapters 11 to 15. When they have finished, ask them to exchange their list with another group and write answers to the other group's questions. Finally, some of the pairs should stand at the front of the classroom and read their questions and the answers they have been provided with to the rest of the class.

### Chapters 16–20, pages 43–60

#### Before reading

- 22 Discuss:** Ask students to think about why Chapter 16 is called *No Kiss*. *Who do you think gets 'no kiss' in the chapter? Why do you think this? Why do you think the person gets no kiss? Do you like the title of the chapter? Why/why not? Does it make you want to read the chapter? Why/why not?*
- 23 Guess:** Ask students to predict what will happen to Mitch, Abby and the other characters in Chapters 16 to 20.
- 24 Research:** Put students into pairs and get them to look up the word *dirty* in a dictionary or on the Internet. Note that they should look up the meaning of the word as it is used on page 49. Make the



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exercise into a competition – the first pair of students to find the correct definition wins. They should stand up and read the definition out loud to the rest of the class. Finally, they should use the word in a sentence as an example.

### After reading

- 25 Check:** Check if the predictions that students made in activity 23 were right or wrong.
- 26 Write:** Put students into small groups and get them to look through Chapters 16 to 20 and write down ten questions regarding the characters, story, setting, etc. (*Who thinks that Mitch tells lies? How long has Abby been trying to talk to Mitch? What name does Tammy give Avery when she first meets him?*) Note that the questions should be able to be answered with one word or phrase. When the groups have finished writing down their questions, they should match up with another group and ask the students their questions. Then they should answer the other group's questions. The group that gets the most questions right wins the round and moves on to the next round. They should compete against another group (and so on). The group that makes it to the end wins the competition.
- 27 Write:** Put students into small groups and get them to write a sentence to describe what happens in Chapter 16, a sentence to describe what happens in Chapter 17, and so on to Chapter 20. Point out that the sentences need to be concise while expressing the main event(s) in the chapter that they describe. When they have finished, some of the groups should read their sentences to the rest of the class. Finally, take a vote to find out which group wrote the best sentences.
- 28 Write:** *Would you like to work for Bendini, Lambert & Locke? Why/why not?* Get students to write a sentence to answer these questions.
- 29 Write:** Put students into small groups and get them to write a short story about Ray's experiences in prison. Note that this exercise can be done in class or as a homework assignment. When they have finished, each group should stand at the front of the classroom and read out their short story in front of the class.
- 30 Artwork:** Put students into pairs and get them to draw a picture to describe the scene in which Ray escapes from prison. When they have finished, the pairs should stand at the front of the classroom and describe their picture to the rest of the class.
- 32 Research:** Put students into pairs and get them to look up the phrase *on the run* in a dictionary or on the Internet. Make the exercise into a competition – the first pair of students to find the definition wins. They should stand up and read the definition out loud to the rest of the class. Finally, they should use the phrase in a sentence as an example.

### After reading

- 33 Check:** Check if the predictions that students made in activity 31 were right or wrong.
- 34 Role play:** Write the word *tableau* on the board and teach students what it means (a group of people arranged on stage as if they are in a picture). Then put students into groups of three and get them to choose a scene from *The Firm*. They should stand up and make a tableau to express the scene. Remind them that they must keep still and refrain from talking. When they have finished, they should stand at the front of the classroom and make their tableau in front of the class, and the class should guess which scene from the book the tableau expresses. Finally, take a vote to find out which group made the best tableau.
- 35 Debate:** Divide the class into two groups and write the following statement on the board: 'Lawyers are dishonest people.' Get one group to argue for the statement and the other group to argue against it. Give them time to prepare their arguments – help them to come up with ideas if necessary. Then get one student from each group to present one aspect of the group's argument. When both groups have finished presenting their arguments, choose the group that made the best argument as the winner of the debate.
- 36 Write:** Put students into small groups and get them to write a short story about Mitch and Abby's new life in the West Indies. Note that this exercise can be done in class or as a homework assignment. When they have finished, each group should stand at the front of the classroom and read out their short story in front of the class.
- 37 Write:** Put students into pairs and get them to work together to write a newspaper article to recount the events in the book. When they have finished, the pairs should stand at the front of the class and read the article to their classmates. Finally, take a vote to find out which pair wrote the best article.
- 38 Pair work:** Put students into pairs and get them to discuss the following questions:  
*Do you think Mitch, Abby and Ray will be safe from the Mafia for the rest of their lives? Why/why not?*  
*What else do you think Mitch, Abby and Ray should do to protect themselves?*

### Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to [www.penguinreaders.com](http://www.penguinreaders.com).

### Chapters 21–25, pages 61–73

#### Before reading

- 31 Guess:** Ask students to predict what will happen to Mitch, Abby and the other characters in Chapters 21 to 25.