About the Playwright: Reginald Rose

By Barbara Stinson Lee

**Directions:** Please actively read the following article about playwright Reginald Rose. You should have five I’s &/or C’s with comments by the conclusion of the reading.

Reginald Rose, playwright of *Twelve Angry Men,* was born in 1920 and raised in New York City. He was the son of William (a lawyer) and Alice. He drew many of the characters for his stories, screenplays, and stage plays from New York people he became acquainted with. Rose began writing when he was a teenager, and sold his first piece, *The Bus to Nowhere* in 1950. He would pen *Twelve Angry Men* four years later after he served on a jury. While in the jury room, he felt the small space would make a riveting setting for a stage play or a screenplay.

Rose attended Townsend High School in Manhattan, where he fostered his writing skills. He briefly attended City College, now part of the University of New York. Inspired by Pearl Harbor, Rose registered and served in the Armed Forces (1942–1946) earning the rank of first lieutenant.
He was married twice; the first time to Barbara Langbert, with whom he had four children, and then to Ellen McLaughlin, with whom he had two children.

Most widely known for work in the early years of television drama, Rose became known for his themes of controversial social and political issues. His realism helped create the slice-of-life television drama which was influential in the anthology programs of the late 1950s.

Rose was quoted by the Internet Movie Database about his experience in the New York City courtroom which led to his writing and producing *Twelve Angry Men:* “It was such an impressive, solemn setting in a great big, wood-paneled courtroom, with a silver-haired judge, it knocked me out. I was overwhelmed. I was on a jury for a manslaughter case, and we got into this terrific, furious, eight-hour argument in the jury room. I was writing one-hour dramas for *Studio One* then, and I thought, wow, what a setting for a drama.”

In fact, *Twelve Angry Men* was originally written by Rose as a one-hour teleplay for *Studio One*. The strength of the teleplay led to Henry Fonda co-producing the screenplay with Rose in 1957. The movie, produced by Rose and Fonda was a black-and-white film directed by Sidney Lumet. The stage play for *12 Angry Men* was first produced in 1964 with revised versions in 1966 and 2004. In 1997, the play was filmed for Showtime. *Twelve Angry Men* was remade for television in 1997. In that version of the play, the judge was a woman and four of the jurors were black, but most of the action and dialogue was retained. The play was once also produced with an all-female cast. Over the years, Juror #8, an architect and the protagonist, has been played by Robert Cummings, Henry Fonda, Jack Lemmon, Boyd Gaines, Richard Thomas, and Bob Bowersox.  Juror #3, the antagonist, opinionated and stubborn, has been played by Franchot Tone, Lee J. Cobb, George C. Scott, Philip Bosco, Robert Foxworth, Randle Mell, and Tom Murtha.

Rose also wrote for all three of the major networks of the 1950-1980 period. He created and wrote for *The Defenders,* a weekly courtroom drama based on one of Rose’s *Studio One* episodes. *The Defenders* would go one to win two Emmy awards for Rose’s dramatic writing

In addition to being a playwright, Rose was a screenwriter, beginning with *Crime in the Streets* in 1956, an adaptation of his 1955 teleplay for *The Elgin Hour.* He made four movies with British producer Euan Lloyd: *The Wild Geese, The Sea Wolf, Who Dares Wins,* and *Wild Geese II.*

His plays include (among others) *The Porcelain Year* (1950), *Twelve Angry Men* (1954), *Black Monday* (1962), *Dear Friends* (1968), and *This Agony, This Triumph* (1972).

Rose’s teleplay *The Incredible World of Horace Ford* was the basis for an episode of *The Twilight Zone* produced in 1963. The episode was broadcast April 18, 1963, on CBS as episode fifteen of season four. The theme of this teleplay was how the past is glorified due to the repression and self-censorship of the negative aspects of our lives. In other words, we remember the good and forget the bad. It had originally showed as a *Studio One* episode in 1955.

Film historian Andrew (Drew) Casper said in his commentary for *Twelve Angry Men* that Reginald Rose is known for both his ensemble work and his realism. Rose paid attention to the small things, like the fact that elderly people, like some members of the jury, went to the bathroom a lot. Rose wrote only for interior settings; he wanted his characters to mirror life, and his best work came from his own experiences. Among Rose’s other awards garnered him Writers Guild of America awards and three Mystery Writers of America awards. Rose won three Emmy awards for television and was nominated for an Oscar for the feature-length film of *Twelve Angry Men*.

Reginald Rose died in 2002 at the age of 82.