

Guilty or Not Guilty? The Different Degrees of Murder

Most states in America categorize the murder of someone by a certain degree. For example, some murders are considered a “crime of passion,” while others are meticulously and maliciously planned. Sometimes a person can even be killed by complete accident! Each murder case would be carefully considered in a courtroom in order to determine what punishment the accused killer should receive... if any!

Research the following terms about the general law and record your findings

First-degree Murder:

Second-degree Murder:

Third-degree Murder:

Voluntary manslaughter vs. involuntary manslaughter:

Plea by Insanity:

When it comes to a trial, in some states, a defendant can waive their right to a jury, which means they choose not to have a jury of 12 people make the unanimous decision “not guilty” or “guilty,” but their case would only be heard by the judge alone. The judge would then make the final decision and decide the defendant’s sentencing.

Using the information you’ve discovered and specific details from the story, “The Tell-Tale Heart,” be the judge in the case against the narrator. Answer the following questions to determine your decision. Provide evidence from the text to support your statements.

1. What evidence is there that the narrator suffered from psychological problems?

2. Did the narrator have a motive? Give evidence.

3. Was the murder premeditated? How do you know?

4. Was the narrator aware of his actions?

5. What degree of murder would you classify this case as? Why?

6. State your final decision as the judge (guilty or not guilty) What is the punishment for your verdict? (If he is *guilty*, how long should he go to prison for? Parole? Should he be executed? If he is *not guilty* by plea of insanity/illness, how long should he be institutionalized for? Can he be rehabilitated?)