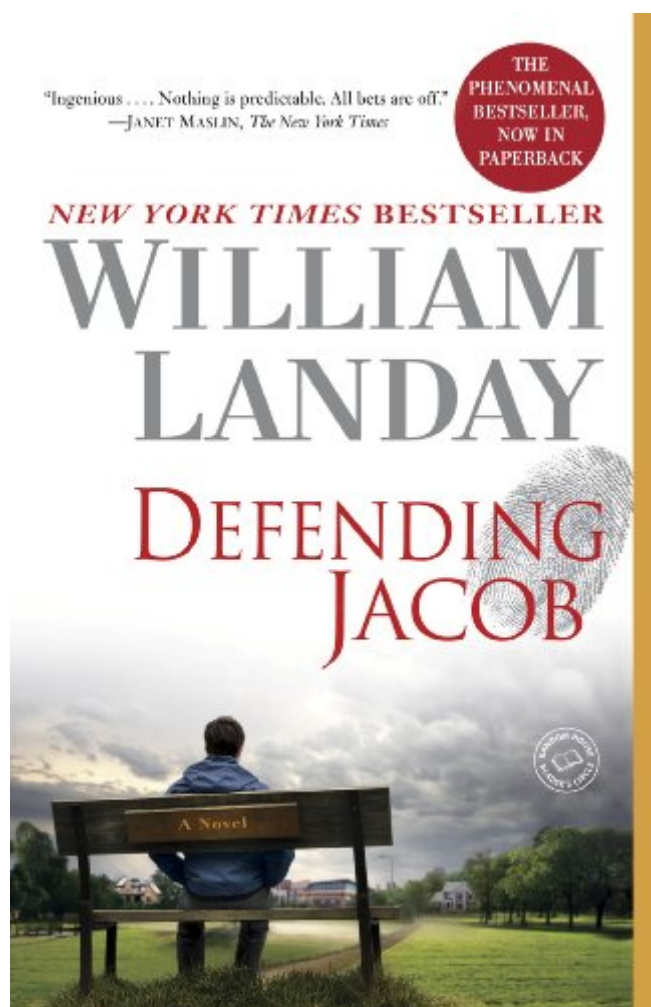


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# Defending Jacob: A Novel



## Synopsis

NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY Entertainment Weekly • The Boston Globe • Kansas City Star • A legal thriller that's comparable to classics such as Scott Turow's Presumed Innocent . . . Tragic and shocking, Defending Jacob is sure to generate buzz. • "Associated Press" • NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER Andy Barber has been an assistant district attorney for two decades. He is respected. Admired in the courtroom. Happy at home with the loves of his life, his wife, Laurie, and teenage son, Jacob. Then Andy's quiet suburb is stunned by a shocking crime: a young boy stabbed to death in a leafy park. And an even greater shock: The accused is Andy's own son—a shy, awkward, mysterious Jacob. Andy believes in Jacob's innocence. Any parent would. But the pressure mounts. Damning evidence. Doubt. A faltering marriage. The neighbors' contempt. A murder trial that threatens to obliterate Andy's family. It is the ultimate test for any parent: How far would you go to protect your child? It is a test of devotion. A test of how well a parent can know a child. For Andy Barber, a man with an iron will and a dark secret, it is a test of guilt and innocence in the deepest sense. How far would you go? Praise for Defending Jacob • "Ingenious . . . Nothing is predictable. All bets are off." • "The New York Times" • "Stunning . . . a novel that comes to you out of the blue and manages to keep you reading feverishly until the whole thing is completed." • "The Huffington Post" • "Gripping, emotional murder saga . . . The shocking ending will have readers pulling up their bedcovers to ward off the haunting chill." • "People" • "The hype is justified. . . . Exceptionally serious, suspenseful, engrossing." • "The Washington Post" • "Even with unexpected twists and turns, the two narratives interlock like the teeth of a zipper, building to a tough and unflinching finale. This novel has major motion picture written all over it." • "The Boston Globe" • "Yes, this book came out in January. No, we are not done talking about it." • "Entertainment Weekly" **BONUS:** This edition contains excerpts from William Landay's Mission Flats and The Strangler and a Defending Jacob discussion guide.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is as much a nuanced family drama, love story, and social inquisition as it is a murder/courtroom/legal thriller. If you can engage with the narrator, whose reliability or unreliability is a puzzle to piece together, you will be satisfied with this warm yet dark story of a community and family unhinged by a violent crime. The author is a former DA who is skilled at informing the reader about the law and procedure without telegraphing it. The narrative is even, polished, and intelligently observant of a community in shock, a family shattered. I have relatives in Newton, Massachusetts, where this thriller takes place. It is an upscale community of educated professionals, whose children graduate from tony high schools and go on to Ivy League colleges. A fourteen-year-old boy stabbed to death in the park is incomprehensible to this insulated and well-heeled population. As prosperous as it is, there is also a provincial air to it, as like-minded families have always experienced security and safety here, and there is an expectation and history of benevolence. Violence is rare. Jacob, the fourteen-year-old son of First District Attorney Andy Barber, is accused of murdering his classmate, Ben Rifkin. In Massachusetts, fourteen-year-olds charged with first-degree murder are tried as adults. Barber narrates the story with depth and dread, exposing some family secrets along the way, which could impact the case, and creates increasing internal trauma for his wife, Laurie. Their marriage has always been an ongoing love story; they met as freshmen in college and have loved each other unfailingly through the years. This event mires them in vulnerability and heavy exposure to the media, placing them under a public microscope. Do they really know their son?

I have just spent the entirety of one night and part of another reading a remarkable novel called DEFENDING JACOB. It's been a while since William Landay has graced the bookshelves with his

presence, and his latest is quite different from his last effort, *THE STRANGLER*. While both books deal with family dynamics and loyalty, *DEFENDING JACOB* hits uncomfortably but unerringly close to home, as compelling a work as you are likely to pick up this year. The basic premise of the book is deceptively simple. A 14-year-old boy named Jacob Barber, is accused of the murder of Ben Rifkin, one of his middle-school classmates. Jacob's father, Andy, has been an Assistant District Attorney for 22 years in the quiet Boston suburb that the family calls home. Andy does not consider his job a stepping stone to higher office; he is content to simply do the best job he can. So when Ben's body is first discovered, Andy takes charge of the initial investigation, working with the police in directing the gathering of evidence. But the investigation seems to proceed slowly, almost from the beginning, and when what evidence there is appears to point to Jacob as the killer, Andy is removed from the case and placed in the position of defending his son from the charges that, from his viewpoint, are most certainly false. In his mind, there can be no other conclusion. Jacob's guilt or innocence is unknown throughout most of *DEFENDING JACOB*. But what is a certainty is that all is not right. Andy is a smart and experienced prosecutor who knows all too well how evidence can be wrongfully construed. Accordingly, he goes through Jacob's things, hiding this and destroying that and concealing the other.

These days, lawyer-and-courtroom books are a dime a dozen. Fortunately, *Defending Jacob* is no ordinary lawyer-and-courtroom book. It's smart, suspenseful, and a downright insightful look into an ordinary family that is on the road to implosion. Along the way, it has much to say about teenage angst, psychology, the latest genetic techniques, social media, family dynamics and more. Put another way, it's a work of literary fiction as well as a page-turning thriller. Andy Barber is the first assistant district attorney with a attractive and empathetic wife, Laurie, and a typically moody teenage son, Jacob. He is also the holder of a secret: his father and grandfather were both arrested for violent murder. Suddenly, he is forced to face a parent's worst nightmare. His son's classmate is stabbed to death and gradually, the circumstantial evidence against his own son is overwhelming. This master of self-control and self-delusion is forced to consider whether the son he loves to distraction is capable of a heinous murder. Is Jacob simply a teenager going through the usual throes of angst and alienation or is he the cold-blooded killer that the prosecutor portrays? How far will Andy go and what will he sacrifice to protect his beloved son? Some of the plot twists are a bit reminiscent of *The Bad Seed*, a 1954 novel by William March that was turned into an Academy-Award-nominated film with a "nature versus nurture" examination. But will the story end up the way that *The Bad Seed* did? Linday is smart enough to keep a kernel of doubt in his readers'

minds. This author excels in creating "teenspeak" dialogue. His teenagers - from Jacob himself to Derek Yoo, his best friend who turns to the prosecution, to Jacob's schoolmates - are so real they could step off the pages.

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