

A Courtroom in the Classroom

Michael Stahl



Miss Blake wanted to show her third grade class what it's like inside a courtroom of the United States, so she decided to stage a role-play. There are many different people in the courtroom during a trial. All of them have different but important jobs or roles. Miss Blake put her students' names inside a hat. Next to the hat, she had a list of the different people who participate in a trial. As she went down the list of courtroom jobs, she picked a student's name out of the hat. She then assigned the student to act out that role in the class role-play. Miss Blake thought it would be fun, and it was!

First on the list was the judge. Miss Blake chose Matthew Schwartz to play the judge. The judge sits high above everyone else in the front of the courtroom. He or she decides what is fair or unfair in the trial. He or she must try hard not to form an opinion on whether a person is guilty of a crime or not. Many people think the judge decides who is guilty or not, but that is not always true. In some cases (called bench trials), the judge decides the outcome of the trial. In other cases (jury trials), a jury decides the outcome of the trial.

The jury is a group of up to 12 citizens. In the United States, people are asked at random to be a part of the jury in a trial. They listen to evidence that is brought up. This evidence proves facts that can suggest the person accused of the crime is either guilty or innocent. The jury has to listen to all of it. Then, all of the people on the jury vote on whether or not the person is guilty. The trial does not end until enough of the jury members agree on whether or not the person is guilty. Miss Blake chose twelve boys and girls to play the jury, and all of them were excited to listen to the evidence from the two lawyers.

A lawyer's job is to use evidence to convince the jury that their version of what happened is right. One lawyer wants to show that a person is guilty of a crime. That lawyer is the prosecutor. The other lawyer, the defense lawyer, hopes to prove the person is not guilty. Christina Slick became the prosecutor, and Jeffrey Gecko was chosen as the defense lawyer in Miss Blake's class role-play.

In the courtroom, there is also a bailiff and a court reporter. The bailiff stands close to the judge. His or her job is to make sure there is order in the court! Miss Blake thought that Jack Foster would be a great bailiff, and luckily picked his name out of the hat for the job. The court reporter writes out everything being said during the trial. This is important in case someone wants a statement repeated later on. Miss Blake chose Daisy Frank for that job.

The last person Miss Blake needed to choose was someone to play the defendant. The defendant is the person accused of doing some crime. They may not have actually committed the crime, however. The jury will decide whether the defendant committed the crime at the end of the trial, after the lawyers have shown all of their evidence to the court. Miss Blake chose Charlie Samuels to pretend to be the defendant, but reminded the class that Charlie was only going to act like a bad boy who was accused of stealing a hot dog at lunch. Now that all of the roles had been chosen, the courtroom role-play could begin!

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What role does a judge play in a trial?

- A** writes out everything said during a trial
- B** decides what's fair or unfair
- C** keeps order
- D** proves a person is not guilty

2. What does the author describe in this passage?

- A** stealing a hot dog at lunch
- B** Miss Blake's class
- C** how to role-play
- D** the roles of people in a courtroom

3. A prosecutor uses evidence to try to show that a person is guilty of a crime, while a defense lawyer uses evidence to try to show that a person is not guilty of a crime.

Based on this evidence, what conclusion can be made?

- A** The lawyers tell the same version of what happened.
- B** Two different versions of what happened are presented at a trial.
- C** Both lawyers want the same outcome.
- D** Only one lawyer uses evidence.

4. The jury in a jury trial must decide whether a defendant is guilty or not. What impacts their decision?

- A** how many times statements were repeated during the trial
- B** how many jury members are part of the trial
- C** the judge's opinion about whether the defendant is guilty or not
- D** how the prosecutor and defense lawyers present the evidence

5. What is this passage mainly about?

- A** where the judge sits in court
- B** where the bailiff stands in court
- C** the people in a courtroom during a trial
- D** the number of people on a jury

6. Read the following sentences from the passage: "As she went down the list of courtroom jobs, she picked a student's name out of the hat. She then assigned the students to act out that role in the class **role-play**."

What does the term "**role-play**" mean?

- A to read about other people
- B to be yourself
- C to pretend to be someone
- D to take a quiz

7. Choose the word that best completes the sentence below.

There are many different people in a courtroom, _____ the judge, jury, lawyers, bailiff, and court reporter.

- A however
- B including
- C so
- D then

8. How is a bench trial different from a jury trial?

9. Describe how evidence is used in a trial.

10. Explain how people with different roles described in the passage work together to hold a trial. Use evidence from the passage to support your answer.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 880

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8. How is a bench trial different from a jury trial?

Suggested answer: In a bench trial the judge decides if a person is guilty or innocent. In a jury trial, the jury members decide if a person is guilty or innocent.

9. Describe how evidence is used in a trial.

Suggested answer: Evidence is used by lawyers to show what happened. Prosecutors use evidence to try to show that a person is guilty, and defense lawyers use evidence to try to show that a person is innocent. The judge and the jury members listen to the evidence before deciding if a person is guilty or innocent.

10. Explain how people with different roles described in the passage work together to hold a trial. Use evidence from the passage to support your answer.

Suggested answer: Student answers may vary, but students can explain how each person plays a distinct role. Students can also explain how lawyers present evidence that the jury listens to decide if a person is guilty or not, while the judge makes sure the trial is fair. Students can also note that bailiffs make sure the proceedings remain orderly and that court reporters keep a record of what is said in case someone needs to hear it again later.