

CHARACTERS IN THE COURTROOM

Learning Objectives: Students will

1. State the positions and responsibilities of all the officers of the court.
2. Utilize problem solving skills through the use of analysis and evaluation.


TEKS: SS 3.17C, 4.21B, 5.24B

Materials Needed: Duplicated and laminated copies of the “Characters in the Courtroom” Learning Stations (#1 - #9) attachment, copies of the “Who’s Who in the Courtroom Identification Sheet” attachment for each student in the class.

Vocabulary: bailiff, court reporter, defendant, defense attorney, judge, juror, prosecuting attorney, witness

Teaching Strategy:

1. Preceding the lesson, tape the “Characters in the Courtroom” Learning Stations on the walls of the classroom.
2. Tell students that various people in the courtroom have special responsibilities to make sure that trials are fair and that everyone is treated equally.
3. Give each student a “Who’s Who in the Courtroom Identification Sheet.” Explain to students that there are learning stations on the walls of the classroom. Each learning station states the characteristics of one of the positions of a character in the courtroom. Using the information at each station, students should match the responsibilities listed on each station with the appropriate position listed on the identification sheet.
4. Allow time for students to visit each station and record their findings on the “Who’s Who in the Courtroom Identification Sheet.” Students may work in pairs, or work independently.
5. After students have visited each station, debrief the activity by discussing the correct answers and the importance of each courtroom character.
6. Attach a label with the name of one of the courtroom characters on the back of each student in the class. (Students should not see the labels that are put on their backs. The names of the various courtroom characters may be used more than once.)

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7. Instruct students that they are going to play a game called “Who Am I?” Students will interact with classmates and try to determine which character they are by asking classmates questions about the job their characters perform. Their questions may only be answered by “yes” or “no,” and students are not allowed to ask specifically, “Am I the judge?” Questions can only cover information about their jobs. Students may only ask each classmate two questions. When students think they have figured out who they are, they should return to their seats.
 8. Ask each student to state who he or she thinks he or she is and why. Discuss the questioning strategies students used and the number of questions asked before discovering their identity.

Extension for Gifted/Talented: Have students create a “Wanted Poster” for one of the characters in the courtroom. Posters should state the characteristics and responsibilities that their selected person should possess. A picture of the character described should also appear on the poster.

LEGAL TERMS

Acquittal

Affidavit

Bailiff

Bench trial

Burden of proof

Charge to the jury

City ordinance

Class C misdemeanor

Closing arguments

Contempt of court:

Counsel

Court clerk

Crime

Criminal case

Cross-examination

Defendant

Defense attorney

Direct examination

Evidence

Felony

Judge

Judicial branch

Juror

Misdemeanor

Motion

Municipal courts

Not guilty

Objection

Opening statement

Overrule

Perjury

Prosecutor

Reasonable doubt

Rebuttal

Subpoena

Sustain

Summons

Testimony

Verdict

Voir dire

Witness

LEGAL TERMS

Words Defined

Acquittal—A court decision of not guilty

Affidavit—A written statement made by a witness that is sworn to be true

Bailiff—The court official who maintains order in the courtroom

Bench trial—A trial conducted by a judge only; no jury

Burden of proof—The requirement to prove a disputed fact in court

Charge to the jury—Instructions to the jury by the judge

City ordinance—A law passed by a city, or county government that may be prosecuted as a crime

Class C misdemeanor—A crime punishable by fine only

Closing arguments—An attorney's last remarks to the jury, a summary of his or her case that calls the jury's attention to important testimony

Contempt of court—Willful disregard for orders made by the judge

Counsel—The legal representative of another; an attorney

Court clerk—Manages the court and handles paperwork

Crime—An act which the legislature has made unlawful by passing a statute declaring all future such acts to be illegal

Criminal case—A case in which someone is charged in court with having violated a criminal statute

Cross-examination—The questioning of a witness by the attorney representing the opposing side

Defendant—The person being charged with a crime in court

Defense attorney—The attorney representing the defendant

Direct examination—The questioning of a witness by the attorney who called him or her to testify

Evidence—Proof presented in court through witness testimony or exhibits

Felony—A crime for which a person can be sent to a state or federal prison; typically punishable by more than one year in prison

Judge—The person who decides questions of law, rules on objections, and instructs a jury at the close of a case

Judicial branch—The governmental branch that interprets law and resolves disputes

Juror—A citizen who serves on a jury which decides the outcome of a court case

Misdemeanor—A crime punishable by fine and/or up to one year in jail

Motion—Application in court made by a lawyer to obtain a rule in favor of his or her client

Municipal courts—Courts created by the Texas Legislature in each incorporated city of the State that hear violations of city ordinances and Class C misdemeanors that occur within the city limits

Not guilty—The determination in a criminal case for the defendant; not enough proof to find the defendant committed the crime

Objection—When an attorney for one side feels the other attorney has violated a rule of evidence

Opening statement—A statement made by both sides at the beginning of the trial, which gives a brief introduction of what each side intends to prove

Overrule—When the judge disagrees with an objection made by one of the attorneys in court

Perjury—Knowingly telling a lie in court after having sworn to tell the truth

Prosecutor—A lawyer who handles the criminal case on behalf of the State or city

Reasonable doubt—The degree of proof required for a determination of guilt in a criminal trial

Rebuttal—An additional argument given by the prosecution after the defense has presented its closing argument

Subpoena—A court order to appear as a witness in a trial

Sustain—When the judge agrees with an objection that is made by one of the attorneys

Summons—An order to serve as a potential juror in court

Testimony—Evidence presented under oath by witnesses at a trial

Verdict—The decision made by a judge or jury as to the outcome of a trial

Voir dire—The process of selecting a jury; from a French phrase meaning “to see and to say”

Witness—A person who testifies in court

Learning Station #1



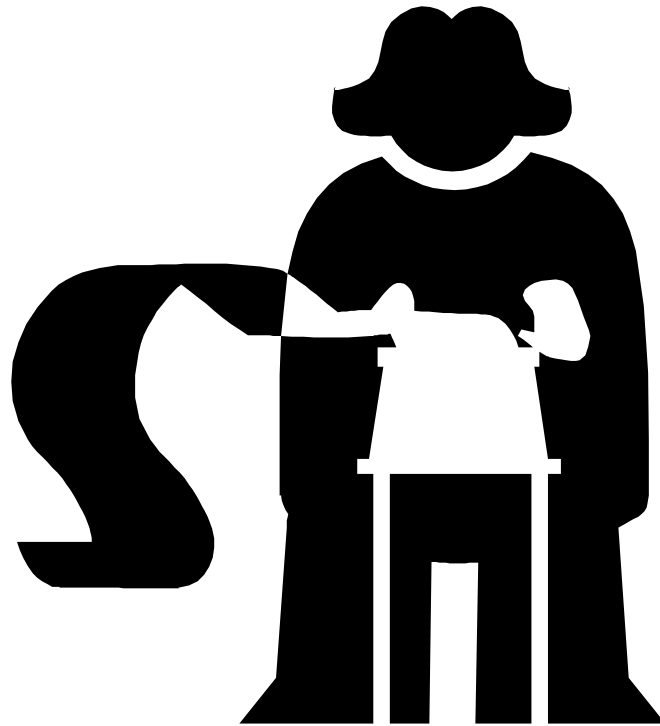
I make sure that the trial is fair and that everyone has a chance to present his or her side of the case. I sometimes have to rap my gavel to keep order in the court.

Learning Station #2

**I am the person who is
accused of doing
something wrong in a
criminal case.**



Learning Station #3



During the trial, it is my job to record everything that is said by everyone in the courtroom. I usually type on a special machine similar to a typewriter.

Learning Station #4



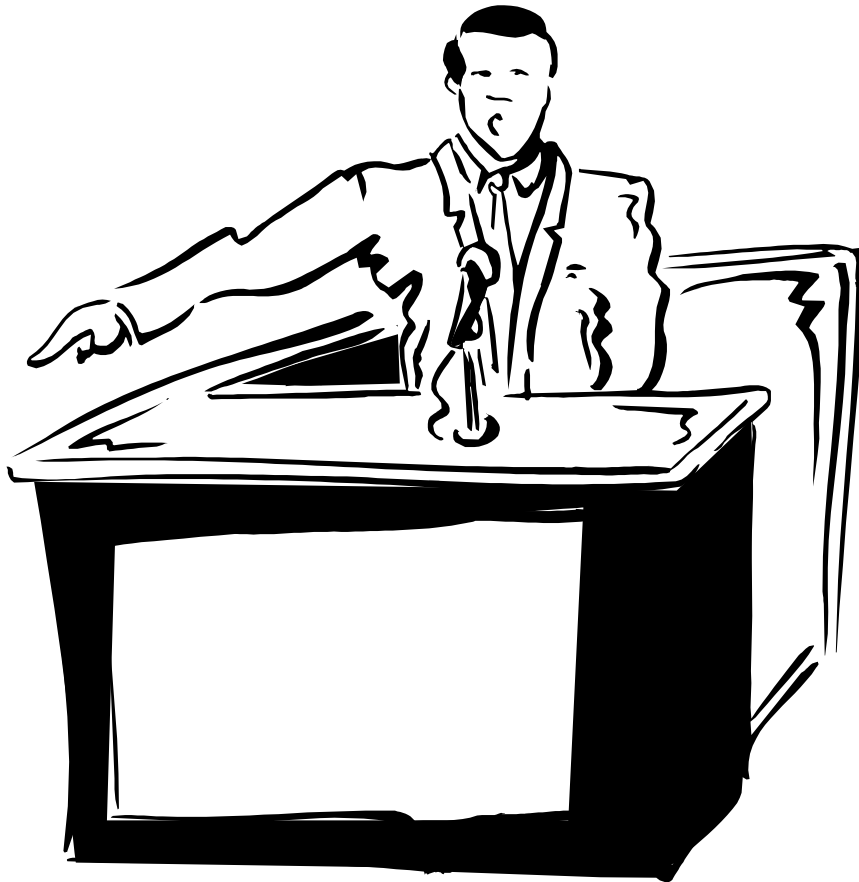
I announce the entrance of the judge and swear in the witnesses. I ask them if they agree to tell the truth when they testify during the trial.

Learning Station #5



I am an attorney, and I represent the rights of the citizens of the State of Texas in a criminal trial. It is my job to convince the jury that the defendant is guilty of breaking the law.

Learning Station #6



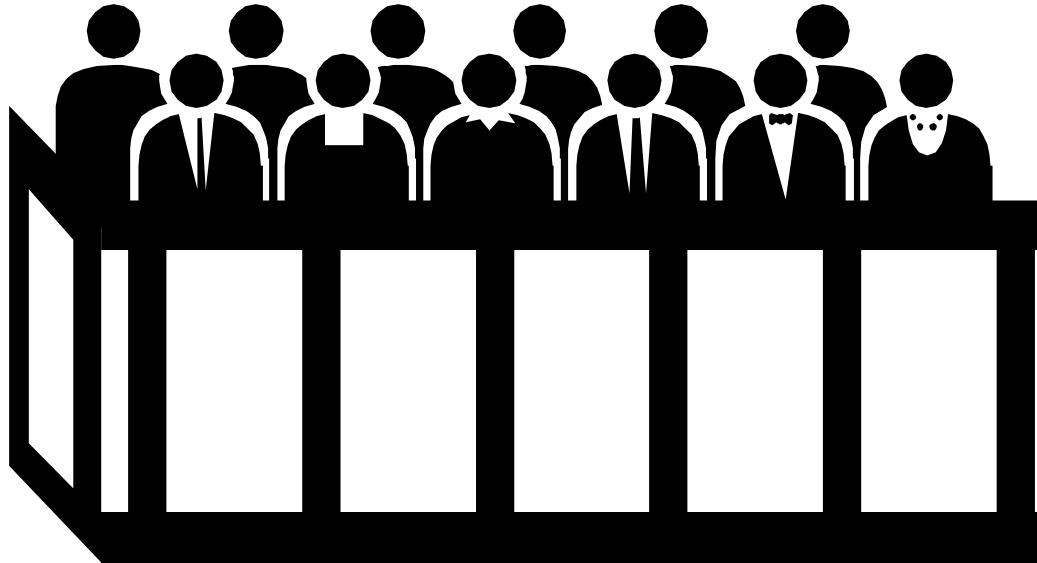
I have been asked to testify in court about what I know, have seen, and/or have heard concerning the facts of the case. I take an oath and promise to tell the truth.

Learning Station #7



I am hired to help people with their legal problems. I represent the defendant in criminal cases. During the trial, I question witnesses to bring out the facts of the case.

Learning Station #8



Twelve (or six) of us listen to the testimonies of all the witnesses during a trial. After the judge has given us special instructions, we decide the outcome or verdict of the trial.



WHO'S WHO IN THE COURTROOM IDENTIFICATION SHEET

Directions: Write the number of the Learning Station beside the name of the person that the information describes.

Bailiff _____

Court Reporter _____

Defendant _____

Defense Attorney _____

Judge _____

Juror _____

Prosecuting Attorney _____

Witness _____