



## Maggie's Civics Corner

### Lesson #38 – Jury

#### Maggie Says...

*Today's lesson is about the role of a jury: The U.S. Constitution provides for trial by jury. Even though the judge presides over most activities in the courtroom and rules on issues of law, the decisions about facts are made by ordinary citizens, i.e. our peers in the community. The jury system is not an American invention. Trial by jury and the grand jury existed elsewhere before our states were even colonies. If I were to serve on a jury trial, I would sit next to 5 or 11 other members of the public (so 6 or 12 in total) in a box to one side of the judge. One of us is selected as the foreman of the jury by the entire jury team before the case starts. He or she will act as an informal chairperson and spokesperson for the jury.*

A jury is a group of people summoned and sworn to decide on the facts in issue at a trial. The jury is composed of people who represent a cross-section of the community. The jury listens to the evidence during a trial, decides what kinds of facts the evidence has established, and draws conclusions from those facts to form their decision. The jury decides whether a defendant is “guilty” or “not guilty” in criminal cases, and “liable” or “not liable” in civil cases. Jurors in some states are selected through voter registration and drivers’ license lists.

When cases are tried before a jury, the judge still has a major role in determining which evidence may be considered by the jury. The jury is the so-called fact-finder, but it is left to “find” facts only from the evidence which is deemed legally admissible by the judge. The judge instructs the jury on the legal principles or rules that must be followed in weighing the facts. If the jury finds the accused guilty or liable, it is up to the judge to sentence the defendant.

#### **Civic Activity:**

**To find out more about the role of a jury ask your parents or older brother or sisters the following questions:**

- Have you ever served jury duty?
- What was it like to serve on the jury? What type of case did you have?
- Were you questioned by the attorneys who were selecting jurors? If so, what were some of the questions you were asked?
- Do you think the jury system is important to the judicial process in America? Why or why not?

**Civic Resources:** Check out the link below to learn about the role of a jury:

<https://judiciallearningcenter.org/the-judge-and-the-jury/>