

Maggie's Civics Corner

Lesson #20 – Jury



Maggie says ...

In these difficult times, as our nation and the world pull together, it is more important than ever to understand our role as a citizen.

Today's lesson is about the role of a JURY. The U.S. Constitution provides all citizens the right to a trial by jury. Even though a 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 with 5 or 11 other members of the public in a special section called the "Jury Box," which is off to the side of where the judge sits. (A jury is either 6 or 12 jurors, in total.) One of us is selected as the foreman of the jury by the entire jury team to act as our informal leader before the case starts. That person's role also then includes: asking questions (usually to the judge) on behalf of all jurors; helping to get the jury discussion about the case started and to stay on course; and, announcing the verdict of the jury to the Court.

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 driver's license records.

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 factfinder, but it is left to "find" facts only from the evidence that 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 brothers 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?

Civics Resources: Visit the Judicial Learning Center site to learn about the role of [The Judge and The Jury](#)