

Maggie's Civics Corner

Lesson #21 – Defense Lawyers



Maggie says ...

As a dog, it is extra important for me to be friendly and follow the rules. But we all make mistakes. And sometimes other people make the mistake but say that I did it even though I didn't. When that happens, I feel sad and think it's unfair. I want the chance to defend myself.

Today's lesson is about DEFENSE LAWYERS. When people are accused of breaking the law, it is called *committing a crime*.

Everyone in the United States is allowed to have a lawyer represent them when they are accused of something. A **Defense Lawyer's** job is to protect and defend people who have been accused of a crime.

Sticky Situation: Imagine that all the sports equipment, balls, and recess toys were taken from your school so you can no longer play with them during recess. One of your fellow students is accused of taking them. How do we know that they did it? What if they didn't do it? Is it fair to accuse them before we know the truth? Do you think that students should be allowed to defend themselves?

What a Defense Lawyer Does: When someone is accused of a crime, that person has a **Defense Lawyer** to help them show they did not commit the crime. The *Defense Lawyer* gathers as much information – called evidence – as they can to show that the person didn't commit the crime. In the United States, the **Constitution** guarantees everyone the right to a *Defense Lawyer* because we believe everyone should be given the chance to defend themselves. If the person accused of the crime cannot afford to pay a lawyer to defend them, the **Court** appoints a **Public Defender** to assist them in this effort.

Activity: Imagine someone has accused you of taking all the recess equipment at your school. Would your school leaders give you the chance to defend yourself and prove that you didn't take the sporting equipment? Do you think it would help you to have someone assist in gathering the information that shows you didn't take it; someone who can help you to present this information? In what other ways could this *Defense Lawyer* be of help to you? Be prepared to explain your answer. This exercise is designed to help you understand why we give everyone in the United States a *Defense Lawyer*.

Civics Resources: To learn more about the role of **Defense Lawyers**, check out this fun game:

[Kid's Court](#) – Home of the naughtiest kids in the world!