

Judges, Juries & Justice

The Constitution and
the Rights of the Accused

Choosing an Impartial Jury

Discuss: In the United States, anyone who is accused of a crime has the right to a trial by an impartial jury. A jury is a group of people who decide if the accused is guilty or not guilty. In our system of government, an accused person is innocent until they have been found guilty in a court of law.



Members of the jury should come to the trial without any bias about the accused. “Unbiased” means the jurors don’t have an opinion about the guilt or innocence of the accused person until the jury has heard all the evidence and listened to both sides of the case. Jurors should decide the “verdict” (outcome) of the case based only on what they have heard in the courtroom. Our justice system works to ensure that all accused people have a fair trial, and the jury is a big part of that system.

Lesson Plan: Help students gain understanding of the challenges faced in selecting a fair and impartial jury.

Read the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. Ask students to pretend that Goldilocks is on trial for breaking and entering the bears’ house and that several students have been summoned for jury duty. Appoint students to portray the role of Goldilocks, prosecutor and defense attorney.

Your classroom’s task is to choose 12 jurors who are most likely to be fair and impartial.

For older students: Make a list of potential jurors from among class members. Working in small groups, students should decide whom they would choose to serve on the jury. In debriefing, probe for why they chose these jurors. At the conclusion of the exercise, ask students to write a short essay explaining why Goldilocks has the right to a fair trial.

For younger students: Write the names of each juror on the board. Ask: “Do you think _____ would make a good juror. Could he/she be fair and impartial?” Ask students to draw pictures of the jury as they hear the case of Goldilocks.