Courts and Our Community

A Companion to Ms. Rivera's Class Goes to Court



Investigate what courts do, explain what you observed, and support your ideas with evidence.

Name: _____

School and grade: _____

Courthouse visited: _____

Visit date: _____

Use your field-trip memories, the coloring book, and the readings in this document. Ask questions when you are unsure.
Printed story page numbers refer to pages in the coloring book.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY 1

From Observations to Questions

Name _____

Recall your courthouse visit. Record specific details rather than only saying the trip was interesting.

What I saw or heard	What it helped me understand

Which detail changed or added to your understanding of courts? Explain.

_____

_____

_____

Write a question your visit did not answer. Who or what could help you answer it?

_____

_____

_____

Work with a classmate. Take turns sharing one observation from your visit. Listen without interrupting, then explain what you heard in your own words and ask a follow-up question. Listening respectfully helps us understand different perspectives.

Court Roles in Action

Name _____

Match each task with a court role from the list below. Use each role once. Refer to printed story pages 7–17 of the coloring book for help.

Court Tasks	Court Roles
Keeps court records and processes paperwork	Judge
Helps maintain courtroom safety and order	Bailiff
Helps people using different languages communicate	Clerk
Makes a record of what is said in court	Lawyer
Helps people try to agree about a dispute	Witness
Makes certain early decisions about warrants or release	Juror
Gives legal advice and represents a person or organization	Interpreter
Describes facts they know	Court Reporter
Leads court proceedings and makes decisions under the law	Magistrate
Serves on a jury that helps decide facts	Mediator

Choose two court roles. Explain how the people in those roles work together to help the court.

_____

_____

_____

Remember: Many hearings have no jury. Not every court has a court reporter at every hearing.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY 3

Read About Fair Court Procedures

Name _____

Read the passage, then support your answers with its details.

Courts help communities resolve disputes and decide cases under the law.
A civil case can involve a disagreement about money, property, or an agreement. A criminal case concerns an accusation that someone broke a criminal law. An accusation is not proof of guilt. Different kinds of cases have different rules and procedures.

Fair procedures give people a chance to present information and respond to the other side. A judge applies the law and manages proceedings. Lawyers represent their clients. Witnesses describe facts they know. A jury, when there is one, helps decide facts. A judge decides facts in many cases without a jury. Decisions must rest on the law and the evidence, rather than a person's popularity.

Access also matters. For example, an interpreter can help a person communicate in a language they understand. American Sign Language interpretation helps some people who are deaf communicate. A court record preserves what occurred so it can be reviewed as permitted by law. Fair procedures support careful decisions, even when the people involved disagree about the outcome.

Summarize the main idea in one or two sentences.

_____

_____

Explain how two details support that main idea.

_____

_____

_____

Why is an accusation alone not enough to show that someone broke the law? Use a detail from the passage.

_____

_____

Where Courts Fit In Government

Name _____

The United States government and Virginia's state government each have legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Virginia's courts are part of the state judicial branch, while federal courts are part of the national judicial branch.

Branch	Main Function	Virginia Example
Legislative	Makes laws	General Assembly
Executive	Carries out law	Govenor and executive agencies
Judicial	Interprets law and decides cases	Virginia courts

Match each example to the branch of government it describes. Each example shows one of that branch's main responsibilities.

A. A court decides a dispute using the law. _____

B. Lawmakers vote on a proposed law. _____

C. A state agency puts a new law into action. _____

Each branch has different responsibilities. Dividing these responsibilities helps keep power from being concentrated in one branch. Why is this useful?

_____

_____

_____

Our courthouse visit showed the judicial branch at work when

_____

_____

Grade 7 challenge: Review "Read About Fair Court Procedures" on page 4 of this activity book. How does a disagreement about money owed under an agreement differ from an accusation that someone stole property? Explain which example involves a civil case and which involves a criminal case, and give your reasons. Continue on another sheet if needed.

Think further: Who makes school rules, and who makes laws? Explain where each applies.

A Courtroom Designed For Its Work

Name _____

Sketch the courtroom you visited during your courthouse trip. Label five features and show where different people work. Use printed story pages 9–15 of the coloring book to help you recall courtroom features and court roles.

Choose two features you labeled, such as the witness stand, seating, or microphones. Explain how each helps people participate in court.

_____

_____

_____

Identify one courtroom feature that helps people with disabilities participate. If you noticed a barrier, describe a change that could help. Explain your answer.

_____

_____

Access Makes Participation Possible

Name _____

Review printed story pages 11–12 of the coloring book, where the students meet interpreters. People may need different kinds of help to enter a courthouse, understand what is said, or communicate with others. These forms of assistance help people participate in court.

For each situation below, suggest assistance that could help the person participate. Explain how it would help. Court staff can explain what assistance is available.

1. A person uses American Sign Language and needs to understand spoken questions.

_____

_____

_____

2. A visitor uses a wheelchair and needs to reach a courtroom on another floor.

_____

_____

_____

3. A person understands another spoken language better than English and needs to communicate in a hearing.

_____

_____

_____

Discuss: How do these examples connect to access in our classroom?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY 8

Civility When We Disagree

Name _____

Civility means treating others with dignity, listening carefully, and expressing disagreement respectfully. You can question an idea or speak up about unfairness while respecting the person.

On printed story page 17 of the coloring book, a mediator helps people talk about a dispute. The mediator guides the conversation; the people involved decide whether to agree.

Fictional problem: Two student groups booked the same display space. One wants to show science projects; the other wants to display poetry. Both want their work seen before Friday.

Work in groups of three. One student represents the science group, one represents the poetry group, and one acts as the mediator. Each representative explains what their group needs. The mediator asks questions without taking sides and helps both students explore solutions. Before responding, explain the other person's concern in your own words and ask, "Did I understand you?" Then switch roles.

1. What matters to each group? Restate both concerns fairly.

_____

_____

2. Rewrite "Your project is stupid. We deserve the space!" as a respectful disagreement that gives a reason.

_____

_____

3. Write a question the mediator could ask without taking sides. Suggest two solutions that consider both groups.

_____

_____

4. Choose a solution and explain why both groups might accept it. If they cannot agree, how could they end the conversation respectfully and ask for help?

_____

_____

Reflect together: Name one listening or speaking choice that showed civility. How could the same choice help people be heard in court?

Grades 6–7 challenge: Explain why civility can matter even when people do not agree. Use a court example. Continue on another sheet.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY 9

Compare The Story with Our Visit

Name _____

Ms. Rivera's students meet many court helpers. Choose two scenes and compare them with your class's actual experience. A difference does not mean either account is wrong.

Coloring Book: Printed Story Page and Detail	Observation from our visit	Similarity or diffference

How does the book help readers understand courts? Use a specific scene as support.

_____

_____

_____

What would you add to the story for students visiting our courthouse? Explain why.

_____

_____

_____



Use your own words. If you quote the book, use quotation marks and give the printed story page number from the coloring book.

Report Accurately About The Trip

Name _____

On printed story page 5 of the coloring book, the class sees a journalist. Imagine writing a short school-news report about your educational visit.

Read these two fictional headlines.

A. Students Learn How Court Workers Help the Community

B. Everyone Who Goes to Court Has Broken the Law

Which headline is more accurate? Explain why the other is misleading.

_____

_____

Write a headline and a four- or five-sentence report about your trip. Tell readers which courthouse your class visited, who went, and two things your class learned. Make clear which statements are facts and which are your opinions.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Accuracy check: Do not invent quotations, names, or details. Report on your class's learning rather than people involved in real cases.



Investigate One Unanswered Question

Name _____

Choose a question that can be answered through reading or an approved conversation with a court educator. Your teacher can provide printed sources.

Possible topics: What does our clerk's office do? How does jury service work? What do interpreters do? What does a magistrate do?

My focused research question is

_____

Plan to use two relevant sources, such as your coloring book, an official court webpage, a printed court handout, or notes from a court educator.

Source title and author/organization	Page or URL and date read	Why is it useful to my question

How will you check who created a source and whether its information is current and relevant?

_____

_____

_____

Starting place with teacher guidance: www.vacourts.gov. Use the official court's description for local practices.



Explain Your Research Findings

Name _____

Use the two sources you selected. Take notes in your own words.
Add the page number, heading, or other location for each detail.

Source	Relevant detail in my words	Location

What answer do the details support? Explain how each source contributes.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Do the sources agree, add different details, or appear to conflict? What would you check next?

_____
_____
_____



Work with a classmate. Take turns explaining your research findings and naming your sources. Ask each other one question about omething that needs more explanation.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY 13

Plan an Explanation of Courts

Name _____

Writing task: Explain how courts and court helpers support fair decision-making. Write for a student who has never visited a courthouse.

My central idea is

_____

_____

First supporting detail and its source

_____

_____

Second supporting detail and its source

_____

_____

How these details support my central idea

_____

_____

My concluding idea

_____

Grade 4: Write one clear paragraph explaining your main idea. Include two supporting details.

Grade 5: Write two connected paragraphs. Include information from two sources and name those sources.

Grade 6: Write three paragraphs. Explain how your supporting details connect to your main idea. Clarify something a reader might misunderstand about courts.

Grade 7: Write several connected paragraphs with a clear main idea. Use information from at least two trustworthy sources, such as the coloring book and an official court resource. Explain how fair procedures give people a chance to be heard. Identify and correct a possible misunderstanding using evidence.

Draft, Revise, and Share

Name _____

Use your plan from “Plan an explanation of courts” on page 14 of this activity book. Continue on another sheet if needed. Name the sources you used for information from readings.

_____
_____
_____
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Revision Checklist

- ○ My explanation is accurate and fits my audience
- ○ I used specific evidence and explained its connection
- ○ I named my sources and used my own words
- ○ I used transitions and a conclusion
- ○ I checked sentences, spelling and punctuation

Exchange drafts with a classmate. Read each other’s work and suggest one specific improvement respectfully. Discuss the feedback, then revise your draft.

Show What You Learned

Name _____

1. Explain how the judicial branch's responsibilities differ from those of the legislative and executive branches.

_____
_____
_____

2. Explain how two court roles help people participate or help a court decide a case.

_____
_____
_____

3. Give an example of why a conclusion needs evidence rather than a guess.

_____
_____
_____

4. What did you learn about fairness or civility? Give a visit or book example and explain how it could guide your classroom behavior.

_____
_____
_____

One question I still have _____
_____