

To Kill a Mockingbird and Courtroom Procedures I: Who are the People in the Courtroom?

By Paul Horton

Overview

The purpose of this set of lessons is to help students gain a better understanding of the trial in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as well as to prepare them for an upcoming mock trial/classroom courtroom activity and a WebQuest. In this first lesson, we will examine the members of a criminal courtroom, ultimately creating job descriptions for each member. We will collect information using a film clip (here, I use *The Rainmaker*, but many options are possible). In the second portion of this lesson, a guest speaker is recommended. And in the third portion of this lesson, we will conduct a classroom courtroom/mock trial using *To Kill a Mockingbird* as our source of evidence. This set of lessons should begin following the reading of chapter 16 (the beginning of Tom Robinson's trial) in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. These lessons are designed with an un-blocked 45 minute class period in mind.

Student Objectives

Students will:

- Identify duties of people involved in a criminal trial
- Understand the duty of each person involved in a criminal trial
- Understand how each duty functions within a criminal trial
- Create job descriptions of each member of a criminal trial team based on prior knowledge and information collected from a film clip

Skills attained:

- Active viewing of a film excerpt
- Identification and individual analysis of career roles
- Synthesis of information received from film clip to help with identification of roles

Materials Needed

- Job description transparency provided below
- Overhead projector/screen
- Job description handouts
- Film clip of trial scene from *The Rainmaker* (approx. 15 min.)
- TV and VCR

The Lesson

This lesson should occur following the reading of chapter 16 of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Estimated time for this lesson is 20-25 minutes for instruction. The remainder of the class hour (approx. 20-25 minutes) should be used for guided student work.

Anticipatory Set

1. Summarize the events of the trial in the novel. Ask students to briefly mention, one at a time, something that happens or an important fact or question regarding Tom's trial. They

can say anything they want, but they must keep events chronological. This should take no more than 7-10 minutes.

2. Mention to students that this portion of the novel is considered the most exciting. To help us understand the significance of this trial, as well as the Scottsboro trial, we are going to hold our own classroom courtroom. In order to do this, we must first understand the parts of a criminal trial as well as who is involved in a criminal trial.

Procedures

1. Assess prior knowledge. Ask students what they already know about the workings of a criminal courtroom. Begin to make a list on the board, on transparencies, and in notebooks of the names of the people involved in a trial (i.e. judge, court reporter, jury members, plaintiff, defendant, prosecutor, defense attorney, witnesses, etc.). Answers will vary based on student experience and exposure. Expect students to have somewhat clouded perceptions derived from TV/film media.
2. Pass out handouts listing the above courtroom members. Instruct students to take notes during their viewing of the film clip. They should record what each person does and says. Students are beginning their assignment for tomorrow: to construct a job description of each person in a courtroom.
3. Ask students if they have seen or are familiar with the film *The Rainmaker*. If so, ask for a brief synopsis. If no one has seen the film, briefly set up the clip of the courtroom scene. While it is not a classic criminal court scene, it is appropriate for classroom use and timely enough for student interest. Of course, other possibilities exist for film/TV clips (i.e. Law and Order). Use whatever works for you in terms of time, appropriateness, and interest, as long as students have the option to critically view and synthesize information for later use.
4. Following film clip, show transparency of how to write a job description, which includes the sample for "teacher." This will serve as preparation as well as guided practice for students' work for tomorrow: create a 50-100 word job description for each member of a criminal courtroom. Sample provides a template for their descriptions.
5. In order to check for understanding, ask students to begin to work on their job descriptions. They should have the remainder of class time, and may work individually or in pairs. Teacher should continue to provide assistance as students begin.

Assessment

Some criteria teachers may use in assessing student work:

Student should:

1. Identify each member of a working criminal court
2. Understand the duty of each member of a working criminal court
3. Demonstrate synthesis of critical viewing and identification of duties
4. Create accurate descriptions of duties of members of a criminal court, based on provided template

Other Historical Connections

For clearly articulated histories of the evolution of the Jim Crow system see, Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*, and Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*. Important images of the Jim Crow South can be found in Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell, *Have You Seen Their Faces*, and at the Library of Congress's American Memory Collection Web Site. For an important analysis of documentary images see, William Stott, *Documentary Expression in Thirties America*.

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List of People in a Courtroom

Attorney

Bailiff

Court reporter

Defendant

Judge

Jury member

Plaintiff

Witness

*others are possible; answers may vary

Format for Writing a Job Description

A _____ is a person who _____ (list behaviors).

In the courtroom, I might hear this person say _____ (list terms/phrases and their meanings).

A _____ may not _____ (list any behavior(s) that may be prohibited for this individual).

Sample Job Description: Teacher

A teacher is a person who helps students acquire important information, grades papers/tests/quizzes, cares that students succeed, enjoys learning, and knows his/her subject matter well. In the classroom, I might hear a teacher say: "Read chapters 11-12 of *To Kill a Mockingbird* for tomorrow," "Remember to write your journals and place them into your folders," and "Study for your test." A teacher may not use inappropriate language in class.