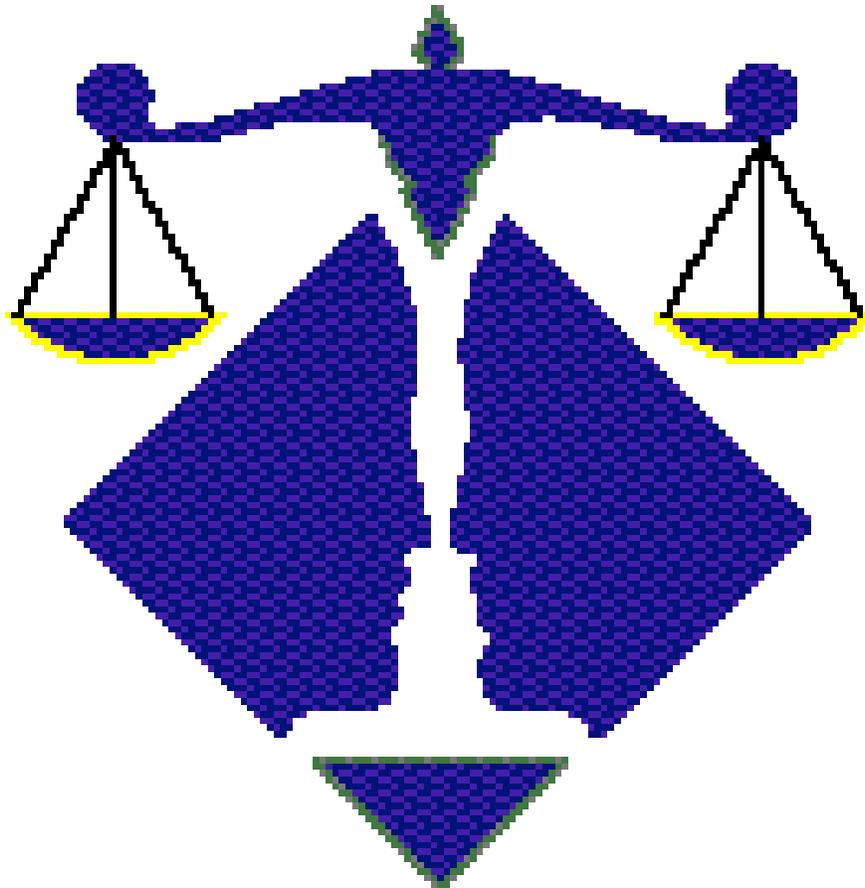


ORANGE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
and  
ORANGE COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT

Classroom Learning Activities

Grade 12

# Guilty or Not Guilty? Understanding Peer Court

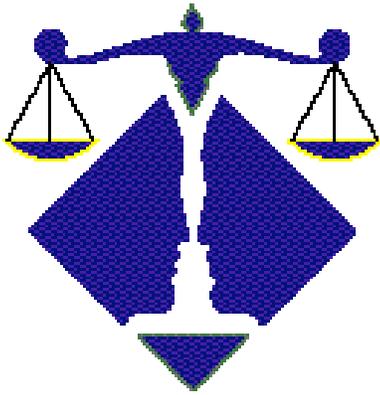


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**Subject Area: American Government**



ORANGE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION and ORANGE COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT  
Classroom Learning Activities/Grades 8, 11, and 12/Guilty or Not Guilty? Understanding Peer Court

**Objectives:**

1. Students will understand the role and purpose of Peer Court.
2. Students will recognize similarities and differences between Peer and “real” court.
3. Students will understand how participation in Peer Court helps prepare them for the role they will eventually play as jurors when they are adults.

**Introduction** (works with either/both activity options presented below):

1. Teacher will lead students in brainstorming the things teens do that get them into trouble.
2. Record brainstorming responses on the board or on an overhead transparency.
3. Students will separate the things teens do that get them into trouble into two lists:  
Things that are dealt with by the family, and  
Things that are dealt with by the legal system.
4. Students will complete a written response to the following prompt:  
Describe an experience you or someone you know had after committing a school, criminal, or social offense. Consider and comment on experiences of the parties involved: victims, parents, the school, and/or the justice system (probation officers, police officers, lawyers, court, the juvenile justice system).

*Please remind students that they do not have to divulge private information.*

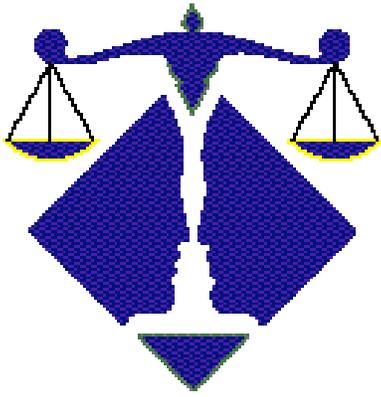


## Activity #1

### Supports learning the role and purpose of Peer Court.

Overview: Students will participate in an interactive discussion and group deliberations. The Peer Court video, “Peer Court,” will be a springboard for student activities. The teacher will facilitate the discussion through the use of open-ended questions.

1. Divide the class into groups of 3 - 5 students each.
2. Show the Peer Court video to the point at which “Adam” and his girlfriend leave the store. Stop the video here and pose teen crime questions to the groups:  
(possible options: write questions on cards and ask each group to discuss and share a summary response for each question to the whole class; pose questions to entire class for responses from individual students).
  - Are Adam and his girlfriend criminals?
  - What makes someone a criminal?
  - Has anyone ever committed a crime against you? Discuss.
  - Should adults expect teenagers to commit crimes? Why/not?
  - What makes something a crime?
  - What percentage of teenagers do you think steal?
  - Under what conditions is it okay to steal?
3. Instruct the class to watch the next section of the video very carefully. Explain that they will be deliberating as though they are the Peer Court jurors. Continue showing the video until the point at which the case is handed over to the Peer Court jurors. Stop the video.
4. Instruct each group to discuss the case and determine the measures they feel should be imposed upon “Adam.” Ask each group to identify a recorder who will list the names of the group members, identify the sanctions the group has agreed upon and the rationale for those sanctions. Each group will report its decision to the class. The teacher will publicly record each group’s recommendations (on the board, an overhead transparency, powerpoint slide, etc.).
5. Watch the remainder of the video. Conduct a discussion on the sanctions proposed by the Peer Court jurors in the video. How do the students’ determinations compare to those of the Peer Court jurors in the video? Do the students feel the sanctions are fair? Reasonable? Sufficient for the crime?



**Activity #2 Supports learning the differences between Peer Court and “real court” participation and supports learning about responsibilities as a juror.**

Overview: Students will participate in expert and jigsaw groups to develop a knowledge base about the role and history of the jury process, and to compare the roles of “real” jurors to Peer Court jurors. The Orange County Superior Court web site and the Peer Court video will provide necessary content information.

1. Divide the class into five Expert Groups as follows:  
“Jury Selection” experts, “Kinds of Cases” experts, “What a Jury Does” experts, “Who May Serve” experts, and “History of the Jury System” experts.
2. Instruct students to access the Orange County Superior Court website and/or distribute copies of web pages relating to Jury Duty ([http://education.occourts.org/jsThe\\_Jury\\_System.asp](http://education.occourts.org/jsThe_Jury_System.asp))
3. Assign reading selections as follows:  
“Jury Selection” experts read the information under the headings “Jury Duty” and “Jury Selection.”  
“Kinds of Cases” experts read the information under the heading “Two Kinds of Cases.”  
“What a Jury Does” experts read the information under the headings “What Does a Jury Do?” and “What Do Jurors Do When They Deliberate?”  
“Who May Serve” experts read the information under the headings “To Qualify for Jury Duty” and “Who May Serve.”  
“History of the Jury System” experts read the information under the heading “The Jury System - An Interesting Beginning.”  
All students independently read the relevant section(s), highlighting or noting important details, definitions, and information. When the members of each group finish their independent reading and highlighting, each shares the information they found most important and develop a group outline or summary. Each Expert Group member will copy the group outline or summary.
4. View the Peer Court video, focusing on the Peer Court experience for student jurors, their selection, their roles, the kind of case presented to them, etc.
5. Create new Jigsaw Groups. Each Jigsaw Group will have at least one expert from each of the previous Expert Groups. All Jigsaw Group members will have viewed the video. Each Jigsaw Group completes a graphic or set of graphics (Venn diagram, matrix, poster, etc.) to identify each of the key expert areas and similarities and differences between student and adult jurors.
6. Provide each student with a 9-square “Walkabout Review” sheet. Students independently fill in three squares, identifying three similarities and/or differences between peer and “real” court. Students then move about the room, interviewing fellow students to obtain three additional similarities and three additional differences, completing the nine squares.



**Activity Closure** (appropriate for use after either/both activity options):

Provide students with the following writing prompts:

1. Describe Peer Court in your own words.
2. Do you support the idea of peer court? Why or why not?
3. If you were ever arrested for breaking the law, would you prefer Peer Court or Juvenile Court? Explain.
4. Look at the class list of things teens do that get them into trouble. Which actions should and should NOT be dealt with in Peer Court? Provide a brief explanation for each. Feel free to add to the original class list.
5. Are there consequences that might effectively prevent students from committing future crimes?

**Discussion/Journal Prompts to Support Learning Activities** (may serve as prompts in English classes, as research project starters, as extended discussion topics, etc.):

1. Describe the major stressors in teens' lives.
2. Should cities have curfews for teenagers?
3. Why do some teenagers smoke cigarettes?
4. Why do some teenagers use alcohol and drugs?
5. What are the likely consequences of being caught with or under the influence of alcohol or drugs on your school campus?
6. If police or school authority figures were searching your belongings or locker and found something they weren't originally looking for, should you be held accountable? Would you be held accountable?
7. What rights do people lose on school property?
8. Should teens who commit certain crimes be tried as adults?
9. At what age should a teen be considered a legal adult? Why?
10. What kinds of rights should criminals have?
11. Does committing a crime make a person a criminal?
12. What makes a person a criminal?
13. Should youth be held to a different standard than adults? Why or why not?
14. Should certain crimes be punished by fines instead of jail time? Explain your answer.

**Extended Learning Activities:**

- Students may discuss the Peer Court Video case with family members and ask them to create a list of possible peer court sanctions. Share the lists with the class and compare.
- Students may discuss any of the prompts with their family members and share comments with the class.
- Students may prepare a current event about a trial, considering the perspective of a juror.
- Use the Orange County Superior Court web site as a resource in creating a chart of the court system in California.



**Focus, Standards, Materials**

The focus of these learning activities is on an awareness of court procedures and law practices. The students will be exposed to the roles and responsibilities of jurors in a court setting.

**Standards Addressed/Supported:**

*Grade Twelve Principles of American Democracy and Economics:*

- 12.2.3 Discuss the individual's legal obligations to obey the law, serve as a juror, and pay taxes.

*California Standards for the Teaching Profession:*

- Engaging and supporting all students in learning
- Creating and maintaining effective environments for student learning
- Understanding and organizing subject matter for student learning
- Planning instruction and designing learning experiences for all students
- Assessing student learning

**Equipment/Materials/Resources Required:**

- Internet Access and/or hard copies of selected Orange County Superior Court web site pages
- Peer Court Video
- Student Handout: Walkabout Review (copy master): Accompanies Activity Option #2
- Orange County Superior Court Education Resource Notebook

# Walkabout Review

Instructions: Complete the top three squares, indicating three similarities and/or differences between student and adult jurors based upon information from the Orange County Superior Court web site and the Peer Court video. Find three additional similarities and three additional differences from classmates to complete each of your nine squares.

<b>My Similarities and Differences</b>		
<b>Similarities Classmates Found</b>		
<b>Differences Classmates Found</b>		