

Murder in the Vale of Slander

This activity can only take place when charges have been pressed against the accused... The class will need to reach a consensus of who they wish to charge for the murder.

This activity is a role-play, which uses all the evidence and information available in "Murder in the Vale of Slander". It is essentially a mock trial of "the accused" for the murder of Professor Parker.

If your students are over 14 you may wish to take them to a Crown Court (or Magistrates Court) to observe a trial as preparation for the role-play.

- The English legal process must be clearly explained to the class, in particular the role of the jury in deciding on innocence or guilt.
- The prosecution must have identified the motive and be able to provide evidence which leads the jury to conclude that "beyond all reasonable doubt" the accused is guilty, in other words they can not convict the accused if they are not sure.
- Discuss the different roles within the court case with the class. Students choose who they would like to play bearing in mind that some of the roles need significantly more work than others. In the case of the crown prosecutor, it might be advisable for students who do not wish to take part in the role-play to support these key positions and help with organising information and questions.
- If your school has taken part in the Motorola Mock trial competition, there may be useful expertise to draw upon. There are links on the citizenship foundation web site which will provide information about the work on mock trials, this is www.citfou.org.uk (http://www.citfou.org.uk/teaching_support/comps_bmt_top.php). The Magistrates Association produces an excellent educational pack on sentencing.

Murder in the Vale of Slander

The trial of _____ for the murder of Professor Parker.

The case is to be held in Slander Crown Court.

The case is to be held on the _____ commencing at _____.

This role play is a simplification of the Crown Court proceedings

It may be helpful to invite a local magistrate in to speak to the students about the process.

The suspect has been charged but has not admitted guilt.

The roles suggested for the case are as follows:

Role of the crown prosecutor

The Crown Prosecution will consist of two barristers. As the Crown prosecutor you need to convince the jury of both motive and opportunity.

- Consider all the information and be sure that all your evidence is convincing...keep in your mind that the jury can only find the accused guilty if that it is beyond all reasonable doubt...(in other words there must be no doubt in the mind of the jury that the accused is guilty of the crime...in this case the murder of Professor Parker).

Prepare the information in such a way that it forms evidence to back up the charge of murder, clearly identifies the motive and shows opportunities were present.

- Consider who you will call to the witness box and the reasons why you will call them.

(You will need a range of witnesses, you should include experts on pollution as this may help to provide a motive for the killing)

- For each witness prepare vital questions which will aid the prosecution.

Role of the judge or QC, the judge must listen carefully and help the jury to understand the issues as well as maintaining the order within the court, when all the evidence has been heard s/he will highlight aspects of the case that s/he feels is important to the jury. When the jury has come to a decision and if the defendant is found guilty then the judge will sentence the defendant. If found guilty of murder then the defendant can only be given life imprisonment, if another verdict is given by the jury which is still guilty of a crime the judge will have to consider a suitable sentence.

Role of the jury (consisting of twelve people) to listen to all the evidence and then decide whether the accused is guilty or innocent. If found innocent then the accused will be set free. You may decide that the defendant is guilty of manslaughter.

The accused – You will need an alibi for your whereabouts at the time of the murder, your defence will need to ask other witnesses to verify your claims, you will also need to find ways to prove that you would have no motive to kill Professor Parker, other witnesses may be able to help you in this.

Role of the prosecution witnesses –you must be familiar with the events around Professor Parker’s death and be able to give some kind of evidence that will help to convict the defendant.

Expert witnesses-there may be several expert witnesses; you will be a scientist who will be able to inform the jury on the environmental problems experienced in the Valley of Slander. You will need to use any data available from Professor Parker’s research as well as other information in the activity. You will need to present this information to the jury and also be prepared to answer questions from both the prosecution and the defence.

Role of the Defence = 2 barristers

You will need to work hard to find members of the community who will support the accused to prove their innocence. You will need to prepare questions for all the defence witnesses; your aim will be to convince the judge that the accused had neither the motive nor the opportunity to commit the crime...good luck!!

Role of Defence witnesses- all defence witnesses must be prepared to answer all questions in court, these witnesses should be taken from the activity.

Preparation: you will need to be informed of the whereabouts of the accused and have some background knowledge of recent events in the vale. You should also be familiar with the geography of the vale.

The Usher: The usher will bring the defendant into court and will be responsible for swearing in and reading out the charges, they will also be responsible for inviting the witnesses into the court. All witnesses remain **outside** court until they are called to give evidence, they can remain **in** court thereafter.

News Reporter: several members of the press will be present in the court; you will be preparing articles for the local/national papers.

Summary of the procedures for the trial

Names of all witnesses for both the prosecution and defence who will be giving evidence must be given prior to the trial, only in exceptional circumstances can further witnesses be called.

- The defendant is brought into court by the usher, sworn in and the charges against him/her read to the court. The trial begins....
- The prosecution details the offences.
- The prosecution calls in witnesses, when questioning is complete the defence calls in their witnesses.
- The prosecution will summarise the facts, which relate to the prosecution.
- The defence will mitigate on behalf of the defendant
- The judge will discuss the case with the jury highlighting what s/he believes to be key facts in the case.
- The jury will retire for two hours to discuss the verdict, if a unanimous verdict is not reached the judge may accept slightly less than a unanimous vote, otherwise the jury will most likely retire to consider the verdict further...(new legislation will allow (in the future) for a re-trial of the accused.)
- If and when a guilty verdict is reached, the prosecutor can then tell the court of other previous crimes committed.
- The barristers defending the case may ask for leniency or ask to appeal against the verdict.
- If a guilty verdict has been reached the judge will pass sentence.

Possible layout for the court scene

