

American Government Jury Duty

One day I got a curious letter in the mail. I had never seen anything like it. I didn't recognize the address, but it seemed to be from the government. I opened it. The letter said that I had to appear in court for **jury duty**¹ on May 23rd. I was excited! I was eager to learn more about how courts work. I might even get to serve on a jury!

Besides voting, I know jury duty is one of the most important responsibilities I can have as a citizen. Jurors work to make sure that each person accused of a crime gets a fair trial. Serving as a juror is another way that the people have power in the United States government. I felt honored I would finally be able to play such an important role.

On May 23rd, I went to the courthouse and sat down in a room with several other people. First, some men and women came in and asked each person some questions. The men and women were the lawyers for the prosecution and the defense. They were choosing the jury for a case involving a woman who had **sued**² a doctor. Did I know the woman or the doctor? Had I ever had an experience with a doctor like this one in this case? The questions were to make sure I would be totally **unbiased**.³

I must have passed the test because, later that day, I found out that I had been chosen to serve on the jury. Next, the lawyers met with us and explained the rules we had to follow. Once the case started and I was in the courtroom, I could not talk to anyone about the case. I could not even read anything in the newspaper that had to do with the case. Most importantly, I could not talk to any of the lawyers or witnesses in the case. All the information I would hear about the trial had to come from the courtroom, otherwise I might be influenced by people's opinions instead of by the facts.

Finally, I was also told I had to pay close attention during the trial. It can be very tiring to sit and listen all day. Still, I would need to listen to every

¹ **jury duty** – service as a juror

² **sued** – started a lawsuit against a person, company, or group

³ **unbiased** – fair, not leaning in one direction on an issue

question and every answer that the lawyers and witnesses give in court, or else I might miss an important piece of evidence.

The trial lasted three days. During the trial, all of the members of the jury sat on benches on one side of the courtroom. When the trial ended, I went into a separate room with the other members of the jury to talk about the case. We **deliberated**⁴ for hours and hours. We knew that our decision was very important. We were deciding whether the defendant was guilty or innocent. Everyone on the jury has to agree or there can be no verdict. After all of the **debating**,⁵ we went back into the courtroom and announced our verdict.

⁴ **deliberated** – carefully thought over

⁵ **debating** – discussing or arguing reasons for and against something

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. A jury is made up of
 - a. criminals
 - b. lawyers
 - c. citizens
 - d. court employees

2. How does the author provide information about jury duty in this passage?
 - a. by listing definitions of legal terms
 - b. by telling the details of her personal experience
 - c. by giving a history of how jury duty has evolved
 - d. by arguing that juries are not the best way to decide cases

3. Which statement best explains why jurors sometimes spend a long time trying to decide if the defendant is guilty or innocent?
 - a. They have to spend three days by law.
 - b. The jurors can never talk to each other.
 - c. Jurors have to stay in the room for two hours.
 - d. All the jurors have to agree one way or the other.

4. Read the following sentences: “I was excited! I was **eager** to learn more about how courts work.”

The word **eager** most nearly means

 - a. mad or angry
 - b. wanting to do something
 - c. tired or wary of something
 - d. afraid or nervous

5. This passage is mostly about
 - a. how lawyers ask questions to choose people for juries.
 - b. why jurors meet privately and decide on a verdict.
 - c. what jurors do and what it's like to be on a jury.
 - d. why the author does not enjoy serving as a juror.

6. How do juries reach a verdict of guilty or not guilty?

7. Based on the passage, explain why jury duty could be called “one of the most important responsibilities” a citizen can have.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

_____, lawyers explained to us the rules we had to follow, and that's why we knew not to read about the trial in the newspaper.

- a. Although
- b. At last
- c. Second
- d. First

9. Read the following sentence.

On May 23rd she learned that she had to appear in court for jury duty.

Answer the questions below based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. One of the questions has already been answered for you.

- 1. Who? she
- 2. What did she do? _____
- 3. When? _____
- 4. Why? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** unbiased: using fair judgment that does not favor a certain person or thing.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____
