



Social Studies: Notes

The work of the law courts



Vocabulary Words

Defendant – someone accused in court of a crime

Constables – rank in the police force

Evidence – the information used to decide whether something is true or not

Jury – a group of people who look at evidence to decide whether or not a person is guilty of a crime

Appeals – take to a higher court

Justices of the Peace (JP) – someone who is appointed by the government to deal with certain legal affairs



The courts

When a suspect has been arrested by the police or defence force, he or she is brought before one of the law courts. It is the work of the courts:

- to settle arguments between citizens
- to punish criminals.

Every suspect – or **defendant** – must be given a fair trial. The Bahamas is a democratic country, and so a person can be punished only when it can be proved that he or she is guilty.



There are four different types of court in The Bahamas: **Magistrates Court, Supreme Court, Court of Appeal and Juvenile Court**. A fifth court is available and that is the **Privy Council**, located in London, England.

Family Island Courts or the Administrator's Court

On the Family Islands, the Administrator hears minor cases and can act as a judge on these cases. The administrator is assisted by local **justices of the peace**, and **local constables**, who see that law-breakers are brought to the court.

- A Justice of the Peace may fill in for the Administrators and magistrates where necessary. Also complete legal work like signing affidavits.

Magistrates' Court

- Magistrates courts are found on Grand Bahama and New Providence.
- Family Islands have Administrators' Courts which act as the same.
- A magistrate judges **minor disputes** and cases such as **traffic** and **licensing offences**.



A **defendant** who is not happy with the judgment of the Administrator can **appeal** to the higher court.

Supreme Court

- When a case cannot be settled in the Magistrates' court it is sent to the **Supreme Court**.
- Cases are heard before a **jury of 12 men** and **women** who are all **ordinary** citizens.
- The jury listens to the **evidence** during a trial and decides whether a defendant is guilty.
- The Supreme Court is made up of **twelve** justices (judges) who are appointed to the bench.

Juvenile Court

- Special court that deals only with cases involving young people under **18 years of age**.
- Young offenders may be sent to an **industrial school** to be given training and special care as to not break the law ever again.
- These schools are the Simpson Penn Center for boys and the Willie Mae Pratt Center for girls.

Court of Appeal

- Located in Nassau, New Providence
- Highest tribunal residing in The Bahamas
- Function is to hear civil and criminal appeals from the Supreme or Magistrates' Courts
- To appeal means to take to a higher court (if a defendant feels he had an unfair case)
- The President (who is a **Justice**) and four other Justices preside over this court

Privy Council

- The Judicial Committee of Her Majesty's **Privy Council** is the **highest court** for The Bahamas.
- Located in England to hear appeals from the Court of Appeals.

