READING COMPREHENSION

TEEN COURT

A second chance



The 15-year-old defendant stood to answer questions in a New York court. She had stolen a dress from a shop and the judge and jury wanted to know the motive. Why had she done it? She explained what had happened and then the jury considered the evidence.

The defendant's parents hoped that the court could help their daughter avoid future problems, but she hadn't listened to people in authority before. However, this courtroom was different to other courts. For a start, before the trial started, a volunteer lawyer had sat next to the defendant to help and support her in court. Furthermore, the judge, lawyers, jury, witnesses and defendant all had something in common: they were all teenagers.

Teen courts have existed in the US for nearly 25 years. They hear cases that involve crimes such as vandalism and shoplifting by first-time offenders and hope to help them avoid becoming second-time offenders. When the young jury members question a defendant, they often ask about their future plans instead of their crime. They want the defendant to think about their situation and how to improve it. To encourage them, if defendants accept the jury's decisions, the court doesn't give them a criminal record.

The young girl in the New York courtroom stands to hear her sentence. The jury has decided she will have to do community service and write a letter of apology to her victim, the shop owner. She will also have to become a member of the jury for future cases. The big question for some people is, will this work? Will this sentence stop her from offending again?

The answer is yes, it probably will. Teen courts are a success and only 11% of their defendants have problems with the law again, compared to 25% of teens who appear in normal courts. So why do they work? The experts believe that teenagers find it easier to accept advice from their peers, especially when they know that some were also once defendants. Returning to court, but as a good guy, is a second chance that most want to take.

1 Why was the 15-year-old in court?

because she had taken a dress. because she had broken a dress. because she had stood a dress.

2 What was different about the court?

All the people were teenagers. The witnesses were teenagers. Nothing was different.

3 What do teen courts try to do?

Sentence young offenders Punish young offenders Stop young offenders

LIVEWORKSHEETS

4 Why does the jury ask the defendant about their future?

He wants the defendant to think about the situation | He wants them to accept everything

5 What three things will this defendant have to do?

Do community service, apologize to the shop owner, and become a member of the jury | Do community service, apologize to the shop owner, and send a letter.

6 What makes it easier for teenage defendants to accept the decisions of the jury in teen courts?

That they receive advice from young people. | That they receive advice from young people who had been defendants too.

7 What did the girl's parents want to happen?

That the court help their daughter | That the court punish their daughter

8 How many crimes have defendants in youth courts committed?

2 | 3 | 1

9 How do we know teen courts are successful?

Because a 25% of teens have problems again. | Because only a 11% of teens have problems

Who do you think said the following sentences: the judge, the jury, the witness, the defendant, the defendant's lawyer or the defendant's parents?

1 'I want to work in the fashion industry.'

○ **a** the judge ○ **b** the jury ○ **c** the witness ○ **d** the defendant
○ **e** the defendant's lawyer ○ **f** the defendant's parents

2 'She just took it and ran out the shop.'

○ **a** the judge ○ **b** the jury ○ **c** the witness ○ **d** the defendant
○ **e** the defendant's lawyer ○ **f** the defendant's parents

3 'Where do you see yourself in five years time?'

○ **a** the judge ○ **b** the jury ○ **c** the witness ○ **d** the defendant
○ **e** the defendant's lawyer ○ **f** the defendant's parents

4 'I'll be here to explain anything that you don't understand.'

○ **a** the judge ○ **b** the jury ○ **c** the witness ○ **d** the defendant
○ **e** the defendant's lawyer ○ **f** the defendant's parents

5 'Does the jury have any more questions?'

○ **a** the judge ○ **b** the jury ○ **c** the witness ○ **d** the defendant
○ **e** the defendant's lawyer ○ **f** the defendant's parents

LIVEWORKSHEETS