CARDINAL COMPASS - CIVICS NO. 6 - HANDS-ON LEARNING - WITH CARL THE CARDINAL

Courts and Fair Hearings with Carl

VOL. 6 Civics - Volume 6 - Version 6

Listening, Evidence, and Fair Decisions. How do we decide fairly when people disagree about what happened?



Cover illustration: a courtroom with the golden scales of justice.

Read together | Do together | Grown-up with you



Meet Carl - Judge Carl

Carl the Cardinal is your guide. For this book, Carl sits at a judge's bench with a small gavel, held gently. Carl is learning how courts listen to both sides and decide fairly. His green neckerchief and gold compass medallion stay on. Color your own Carl on the last page.

How to use this book

Read pages 2 and 3 together first. Then try the activities in order: sort Fair or Not Fair, hold the Wolf's Sneeze hearing, and play the Listening Jury at home.

You will need: pencils, and scrap paper for a rule card and for any cards you make yourselves. The Fair or Not Fair cases are printed on page 4 and the evidence cards are printed on page 6, so there is nothing to cut out. A small gavel or wooden spoon is optional.

Safety and respect: a grown-up stays with every activity. If you use a spoon or gavel, tap it gently on the table only. Never swing it at people.

What is a court?

What you already know: In Book 2, the Bill of Rights listed promises that protect people, including fair steps when someone is accused. This book visits the place where those steps happen: a court.

Court: a place where a judge, and sometimes a jury, listens to both sides and decides.

Judge: the person in charge of the hearing. The judge keeps the rules, explains the law, and decides some cases alone.

Jury: a group of ordinary people who listen and decide what happened in some cases. Jurors are neutral: they are not on either side. Not every case has a jury, and a jury is not always twelve people.

Evidence: what is shown to help decide what happened: things seen, objects, and what witnesses say. What something means is worked out in the hearing, not assumed.

Witness: a person who tells what they saw or know.

Accused: the person said to have done wrong. In Book 2 you learned the accused has rights.

Fair hearing: both sides get to speak, the same rule is used for everyone, and the deciders listen before they decide.

Civil case: a case between people or groups about a harm or a broken agreement, not a crime charged by the government. The Wolf's Sneeze hearing on pages 5 and 6 is a civil case about wrecked homes.

Carelessness: not taking the care a careful person would take. Running near others with open scissors can be careless, even if nobody meant harm.

Appeal: asking a higher court to check whether a mistake that mattered was made. Most appellate court appeals look at the written record for legal error. In Virginia, a district court appeal to a circuit court is generally heard anew. See page 8.

Book 2's promises guard the accused in a criminal case: a speedy, public trial, a lawyer, and a jury in the cases the Constitution names.

Grown-up note: in a criminal case the government must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, and the accused is presumed innocent until then. That higher burden is for criminal cases only. This book's civil hearing uses the lower burden on page 5. A civil case does not by itself give anyone a government-provided lawyer.