

# The Magistrates' Court Mock Trial Competition (ages 12-14)

Active Citizenship Programmes



## Year 8 Young Citizens Magistrates' Court Mock Trial Competition Saturday 7th March 2026

*'Step carefully and don't touch the red emergency lights or you'll light up the whole building!' Grzegorz (Y8) and I obediently followed the security guard's dark stab vest deeper and deeper into the gloom of the vaults starkly illuminated by scarlet LED emergency lights. We could barely see but could just about, to the left and right of us make out the outlines of the small concrete holding cells with their heavily reinforced steel doors and concrete bunks excavated into the walls. Doorways led into shadowy stainless-steel kitchen spaces, others into bleak rooms, furnished only with a single table and three plastic chairs. At 0830 on an overcast Saturday morning, neither Grzegorz or I expected in our wildest dreams to be 'taken down' to the desolate prisoner cells underneath the Southampton Courts of Justice, but it did bring home the realities of facing trial as a defendant on remand.*

The security guard took us upstairs to Crown Court 4, where in less than an hour, the St Mark's 'Mock Turtles' would, for the first time, both prosecute and defend a fictional trial against another school in the Young Citizens Magistrates' Court Mock Trial Competition. The competition seeks to teach students more about criminal law, the criminal justice system, and how courts work in a fun and innovative way. It seeks to build bridges between citizens, our legal institutions, magistrates and legal professionals and provides a rewarding and challenging experience for all students regardless of their ability or personal background, helping students to develop a range of skills including listening, reasoning, public speaking, confidence and, most dauntingly, the ability to think on their feet.

The St Mark's Mock Turtles, a group of around twenty exuberant Year 8 volunteers, have dutifully met after school every Tuesday to learn about the judicial system and prepare the fictional case of R v Hanley, concerning the theft of a valuable UPhoneX contrary to Section 1 of the Theft Act 1968.

I am not exaggerating when I say that bearing in mind

- None of us had any previous knowledge of the judicial system or the operations of a magistrates' court;
- St Mark's had never entered this kind of complex competition (the final scripts totalled 7000 words);
- We were up against South Wilts Girls' Grammar School with a formidable track record in this competition;
- Our Year 8 students were competing against their Year 9 students; and
- We had a third of the other school's preparation time

...the odds were very much against us winning.

*I spotted a note on one student's script from early in the competition reading 'We're cooked, bro!' □  
(We weren't, as you will read!)*

With rousing David and Goliath-themed Google Classroom messages inspiring them (and hopefully reminding them of their Year 7 English Abrahamic Tales curriculum), and after a brief welcome by Azmi Quraishie JP, the Organiser, the Turtles mobilised!

What ensued was what I could best describe as quick-fire verbal skirmishes, which disappeared at times deep into the undergrowth and emerged just as keenly-fought and finely-balanced, linguistic blades glinting in the cold morning light and the sparks of higher-order-thing flying as accusations parried and defences riposted.

Ali and Gabriel wielded sharp verbal sabres as First and Second Prosecution Lawyers; Amber and Alexa played convincing First and Second Prosecution Witnesses fending off questions during both the examination-in-chief and the cross-examination; Emma knowledgeably advised the magistrates as Legal Adviser; Eisha and David were incisive and perceptive as First and Second Defence Lawyers; and Adam and his sister Julia presented plausible and characterful First and Second Defence Witnesses. Well done to Krachelle for her supportive role as Usher and to Emmanuel, Grzegorz, Sam, Tania and Malakai for playing the role of Student Magistrates, guided by a real-life professional Magistrate towards the verdict of **guilty or not guilty**.

The outcome? **Both** St Mark's and the other school **unsuccessfully prosecuted**, (as expected in this difficult to prove case), but **both** schools also **successfully defended** the case. So, all square at the end of proceedings....

..and then came the agonising waiting game...the final results of the competition were due at 13:45 but the clock slowly ticked on past the hour, which encouraged us...the judges were clearly deliberating hard...

At 14:10, we were summoned back into Courtroom 4 and Azmi Quraishie JP, organiser, congratulated both schools on their performances, thanked the students and the staff and all of the amazing volunteers, including the helpful security guards, for making the competition possible.

Although, the result was a very close call, St Mark's is not, (quite rightly), proceeding to the next round, but I cannot be prouder of the courage and tenacity that our students showed in sharpening their swords, preparing for battle and stepping up and forward with such initiative, confidence and independence to take on this fascinating project. One of the judges later commented that he had been involved in this competition for twenty years and we were the best newcomers he had ever seen! We will take that!

Thank you to Scott Bailey LLP for sponsoring our entry to the competition!


We are DEFINITELY entering this competition again next year and now know some of the subtler strategies and tactics which we can employ to vanquish our opposition (I was taking notes!)

Well done, Turtles; what we will do with our Tuesday evenings and weekends from now on I have no idea but I look forward to once more putting our chelonian beaks before the beaks!

Ed Balfour


**English Department and Year 8 Tutor**

Role	Event (Spoken lines in bold type)	Timing
<b>BEGINNING OF TRIAL</b>		
Usher	<b>'Court rise'</b>	N/A
Everyone	Stands	
Usher	Lead magistrates into courtroom	
Magistrates	Enter the court, bow and sit. Lawyers and court staff bow in return	
Everyone	Sits	
Legal Adviser	Stands. <b>'The prosecution is represented today by [names] and the defence by [names]'</b> . Gives the ID slips to the lead magistrate	
Legal Adviser	Legal adviser asks the defendant to stand	
Defendant	Stands	
Legal Adviser	<b>'What is your name?'</b>	
Defendant	<b>'My name is...'</b>	
Legal Adviser	<b>'Is your address...?'</b>	2 minutes
Defendant	<b>'Yes'</b>	
Legal Adviser	<b>'Is your date of birth...?'</b>	
Defendant	<b>'Yes'</b>	
Legal Adviser	<b>'Are you represented by...?'</b>	
Defendant	<b>'Yes'</b>	
Legal Adviser	<b>'You are charged with...'</b> (insert charge from Case Outline here). <b>'Do you understand?'</b>	
Defendant	<b>'Yes'</b>	
Legal Adviser	<b>'How do you plead?'</b>	
Defendant	<b>'Not guilty'</b>	
Legal Adviser	To the magistrates: <b>'We are in a position to proceed with the trial today. May the defendant be seated?'</b>	N/A
Lead Magistrate	Gives the defendant permission to sit down.	
<b>CASE FOR THE PROSECUTION</b>		
1st Prosecution Lawyer	Makes the opening speech	4 minutes
1st Prosecution Lawyer	Calls the 1st prosecution witness	N/A
Usher	Leads the witness to the witness box. Asks them to repeat this affirmation: <b>'I do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'</b>	
1st Prosecution Witness	Repeats affirmation	
1st Prosecution Lawyer	Examination-in-chief of 1st prosecution witness	4 1/2 minutes
1st Defence Lawyer	Cross-examination of 1st prosecution witness	4 1/2 minutes
Usher	Leads the 1st prosecution witness back to his / her seat	N/A
2nd Prosecution Lawyer	Examination-in-chief of 2nd prosecution witness	4 1/2 minutes
2nd Defence Lawyer	Cross-examination of 2nd prosecution witness	4 1/2 minutes
Usher	Leads 2nd prosecution witness back to his / her seat	N/A
1st Prosecution Lawyer	Asks legal adviser to read Section 9 statement	
Legal Adviser	Please note the legal adviser cannot read the Section 9 statement unless prompted to do so by the 1st prosecution lawyer	
Legal Adviser	Reads Section 9 statement	Up to 3 minutes
2nd Prosecution Lawyer	<b>'This is the case for the prosecution'</b>	N/A
<b>CASE FOR THE DEFENCE</b>		
1st Defence Lawyer	Calls the defendant	
Usher	Leads defendant to the witness box. Asks them to repeat this affirmation: <b>'I do solemnly...'</b> (as above)	
Defendant	Repeats affirmation	
1st Defence Lawyer	Examination-in-chief of defendant	4 1/2 minutes
1st Prosecution Lawyer	Cross-examination of defendant	4 1/2 minutes
Usher	Leads defendant back to his / her seat	N/A
2nd Defence Lawyer	Calls 2nd defence witness	
Usher	Leads 2nd defence witness to the witness box. Asks them to repeat this affirmation: <b>'I do solemnly...'</b> (as above)	
2nd Defence Witness	Repeats affirmation	
2nd Defence Lawyer	Examination-in-chief of 2nd defence witness	4 1/2 minutes
2nd Prosecution lawyer	Cross-examination of 2nd defence witness	4 1/2 minutes
Usher	Leads 2nd defence witness back to his / her seat	N/A
1st Defence Lawyer	Makes closing speech. <b>'That is the case for the defence'</b>	4 minutes
<b>CONCLUSION OF THE TRIAL</b>		
Legal Adviser	Summary of the law for the magistrates	3 minutes
Usher	<b>'Court rise'</b>	N/A
Everyone	Stands	
Magistrates	Retire to consider their verdict	15 minutes
Usher	<b>'Court rise'</b>	N/A
Everyone	Stands	
Usher	Leads magistrates into courtroom	
Magistrates	Enter the court. Bow to the court before sitting. Lawyers and court staff bow in return	
Everyone	Sits	



## Magistrates' Court Mock Trial

Case 1: R v Hanley




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## Magistrates' Court Mock Trial Competition

Student Role Guide: Lawyer  
England, Wales and Northern Ireland



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