

Curriculum Guide

Sawyer the Critter Lawyer: Trial & Error by Robin Newman, illustrated by Deborah Zemke

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Lexile level 500L, Guided Reading Level M, Grade Level Equivalent 2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.2.3,3a,4,4a,4b,4c,4d,5,5a,5b

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.2.3,3d,3e,3f,4,4a,4c

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.1,2,3,4,5,6,7,10

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.1,1b,1c,2,4,6

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.3,5,6,8

Logical thinking, deductive reasoning, figurative language, idioms, hyperbole, metaphor

Themes:

Justice, Fairness, Right & Wrong

Sawyer becomes a lawyer because she wants to help animals figure out how rules can help us. Make a list of rules you think make things easier to do. How can rules solve arguments that people have, like the case of the squabbling squirrels?

Write your own legal case:

Start by describing a way a person might get into trouble. Maybe by fighting with someone at school, maybe by not handing in homework when its due.

What happens when the person breaks the rules?

How can things be solved?

Act like a lawyer:

Imagine that you're a lawyer like Sawyer and somebody comes to you with a problem. What kinds of questions do you need to ask? How would you find a solution for them? What's the difference between taking a case to court or using mediation? Which one do you think is easier?

Create a legal problem and have your class act it out. Someone can be the lawyer, someone the client, someone the judge, someone the prosecuting lawyer (the one arguing against your client). Write down what kinds of testimony is given, what evidence is there for the crime, and what the resolution is.

Figurative language:

Trial & Error uses a lot of puns and idioms. Make a list of all the ones you can find and describe the double meanings, like "jaywalking" could mean walking like a jay bird or crossing the street when the light is red or outside of the crosswalk.

Invent your own legal puns. Have fun playing with language!

Activities:

Make a list of the kinds of evidence Sawyer uses in all her cases. Some of it is testimony, what people say, but some of it is video, like in the case of the jaywalking chicken.

See what happens when a witnesses describe the same event. How does the chicken's description to Sawyer differ from what the police officer says?

How reliable do you think witnesses are?

Have somebody new walk into the classroom, make a brief announcement, then walk out. Ask your students to write down or draw everything they remember about the person and what they said. Do people agree on what the person wore? How they looked? What they said?