

Yertle the Turtle Fifth Grade

Yertle the Turtle Mock Trial

Read the story Yertle the Turtle

Post Reading and reason for the trial

Yertle is the dictatorial and oppressive king of a pond. He decides that his kingdom is too small and demands that the other turtles stand on each other's backs to build a high, then higher, then higher throne for the Mighty Yertle. Yertle's reign is toppled by a simple, innocent act committed by the lowest turtle in the stack.

We will now hold a mock trial that is built upon the original story we just heard. The personal plights of many unidentified characters in this story have been ignored. For example, one of the turtles in the middle of the stack of turtles is named Sadie. Sadie is quiet, well behaved and cooperative when ask to help with something.

Sadie was frightened when she was asked to climb up to the top of the pile of turtles, and even more frightened when additional turtles began to climb onto her, in order to stack turtles higher and higher. But she obeyed. She didn't say a word. She was just a young turtle, and King Yertle was older and in a position of great authority. After the great stack of turtles collapsed, Sadie had a terrible shell ache. She didn't think about it too much until the pain persisted for several weeks. Then her mother took her to the local reptile doctor for an examination. The doctor was concerned and said that Sadie had a thin crack in her shell which may never heal properly. She told Sadie to rest and not to do any heavy work.

Sadie couldn't even walk to school. She was very sad. Her mother was angry and said that King Yertle had no right to tell a young turtle to bear the weight of other turtles on her shell. She said that she would sue the Turtle King and get enough money to take care of Sadie's medical problems. She also wanted to make sure that Yertle did not abuse other turtles again. Sadie's mother did not think that even a King could ask turtles to risk hurting themselves just to satisfy his need to be even greater.

Since Yertle didn't want to guarantee justice for his subjects by hearing their cases himself, he established an independent court. This will be a civil trial, so Yertle may not be put in jail. Depending on the outcome, he may be required to pay for Sadie's medical costs as well as an additional amount for having violated her inalienable turtle rights.

Students will need to be chosen to play each of the parts

Plaintiffs Attorney & Plaintiff's Witnesses	Defenses Attorney & Defense's Witnesses
Mack	Mertle
George Snapper	Dr. Sam
Yolanda	Yertle
Lyn Lizard	Hector
Sadie	Frank Flycatcher
Slither	

Beginning the Mock Trial

Explanation for all students

Each attorney may make an opening statement. This is the attorney's opportunity to tell the jury a little about the case and what he or she intends to prove.

After opening statements, each attorney may call witnesses. In this mock trial, each witness will read their statement for the jury to hear.

After all the witnesses have testified for each side, each attorney delivers a closing argument to talk with the jury and summarize what the witnesses have said that helps his or her side of the case. The attorney tells the jury why they should agree with his or her client's position.

After closing arguments, the jurors will review and discuss the case privately. When they all agree on a verdict, the head juror will tell the judge what they have decided.

A Note to Jurors (remaining class members remember to choose a head juror)

Your job is to listen very carefully to what the witnesses say and make notes on your jurors note pad. You will be responsible for determining:

- (1) whether they are telling the truth,
- (2) whether what they say is important to the case, and
- (3) whether they are accurate when they give their information.

Then you must compare the testimony of the witnesses:

Do the facts fit together?

Was one side more reasonable than the other?

Are you persuaded that a king may be held responsible for his actions?

Do you think that this king should be in this situation?

Your verdict must be unanimous and, if you determine that the king will be held responsible, you must decide what he must do to compensate for Sadie's alleged injury.

Roles for the Plaintiff

Attorney for the Plaintiff

(Your responsibility is to represent Sadie.)

Explain: Yertle abused his authority. Sadie was injured as a result of his action. Because Sadie is a young turtle, she did not know how to protect herself when Yertle was so demanding. It is important to teach Yertle that even a king may not order other turtles around without good reason.

Witnesses for the Plaintiff

Mack

I was the turtle at the bottom of the stack. I felt as if I were being bullied by the king and was afraid to object until I couldn't stand it any longer. Yertle did not listen to you even when you did complain to him. I have had shell problems since that dreadful day in the pond. I believe that Yertle should be held responsible for Sadie's misfortune.

George Snapper

I am a member of the Turtle Council. I have been elected by all the turtles and feel a responsibility to make sure that they are all treated fairly. I feel that King Yertle often thinks only of himself and ignores the rights and needs of others. I hope that the jury will agree with me and order Yertle to stop pushing everyone around and pay for Sadie's medical expenses.

Yolanda

I work for Yertle as his assistant, and I enjoy most of the work I do. But sometimes Yertle can be very mean, and I am afraid to speak up because he is the king. I have never complained before, and I am afraid that Yertle will fire me if I stand up for Sadie. Yet, I feel that Sadie's rights have been violated, and I must take the risk and speak up for her.

Lyn Lizard

I am a physician who specializes in the treatment of reptiles. I have been Sadie's doctor since the day she was hatched and know that she has always been a healthy turtle. After she fell off the stack of turtles and into the pond, I examined her and determined that there was a thin crack in her shell. I have treated similar cracks before and know that they may cause pain and suffering for many years, although sometimes they eventually heal. You do know that Sadie will need special care. She will not be able to go to school or play with other turtles for a long while.

Sadie

I hurt my shell when I fell from the stack of turtles that Yertle ordered me to be a part of. I do not think that it was fair that Yertle told me to climb up on the other turtles, but I obeyed because my parents had always told you to respect your elders and royalty. Now I have a serious shell injury and cannot play with my friends, or even go to school. I am very sad and worried about the future. I think that Yertle, even if he is a king, did not behave properly and should be held responsible for his actions.

Slither

I am Sadie's mother, and I am very upset. My beautiful young daughter was injured because a tyrant ordered her to climb onto a stack of turtles. Yertle did not use good judgment by asking a young turtle to do such a thing. I also feel it was selfish of him to order other turtles to do something dangerous. I want the jury to order Yertle to pay for all Sadie's expenses and never take advantage of other turtles again.

Roles for the Defense

Attorney for the Defense

Yertle is the king and, as protector of the realm, has a right to order his subjects to do whatever he thinks is necessary. He thought it was necessary to see what was beyond his pond and pressed other turtles into service so that he could see that far. They were hurt in the line of duty, so he wasn't personally liable for Sadie's injury. He did not realize how young she was, or he wouldn't have ordered her to join the stack of turtles.

Witnesses for the Defense

Mertle

I am Yertle's sister, and I believe that Yertle has a traditional right to tell other turtles what to do. I argue that royalty may not be sued because they are the only ones in a position to know what's best for everyone in their kingdom, given that monarchs have all the information, plus the best advisors to help interpret it. Someday I may become queen, and I do not want the turtles to think that there will be limits on my power to set policy. I want the jury members to know that, when I am queen, I will make decisions based on what I think is best for the kingdom. Yertle has this same right today, and he is not responsible for Sadie's shell injury.

Dr. Sam

I am the royal physician, and you are a turtle. I have taken care of the royal family for many years and am an expert in turtle health, including the resistance, durability, and recuperative powers of the turtle shell. I want the jury to know that Dr. Lyn is nothing but a thin-skinned lizard who is hardly qualified to treat turtles, much less testify in their behalf. I am telling the jury that Sadie's injuries are not serious, and I am sure that, while she is quite shaken, she will be much better very soon. In fact, she may be exaggerating how much pain she actually feels, as youngsters sometimes do when they want or need attention. Yertle should not have to pay for a limp lizard to treat Sadie.

Yertle

I am insulted that members of my kingdom would even think that they have a right to question my judgment, or to sue me. Subjects may not sue a king. I do not think that the court, or members of the jury, have the authority to tell me what to do. I am telling all the jurors that they are not respecting the authority of the royal family and should go home and back to work where they belong.

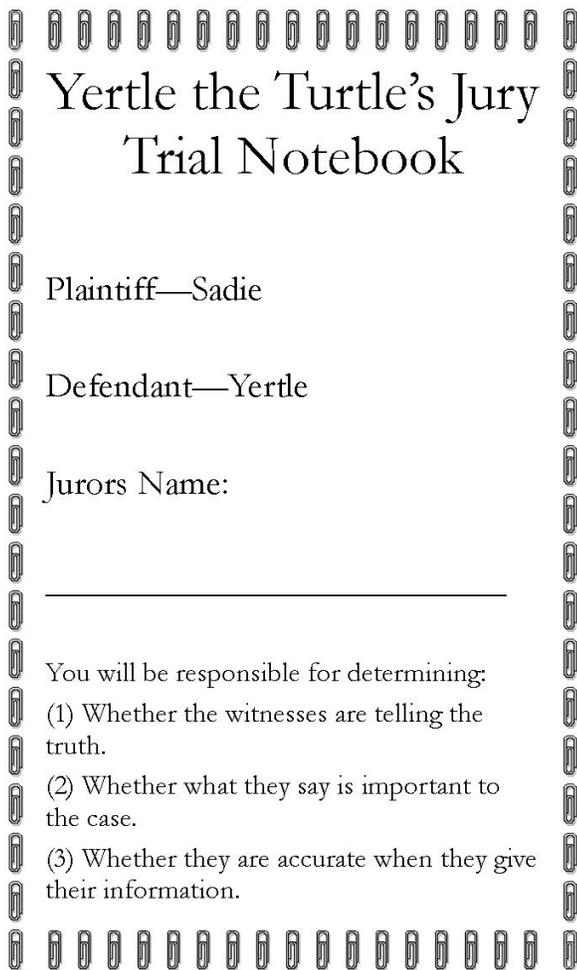
Hector

I am an old turtle and know what the kingdom was like a long time ago. Today, some turtles think that they do not have to obey the rule of the king. They are wrong. In the old days, the people always did what the king told them to do and led happy and healthy lives. That is why you have lived so long yourself. All the king's subjects should show their respect for him and not embarrass him.

Frank Flycatcher

I am Yertle's best friend. I believe that he really cares about the people in his kingdom. When he is bored, he sometimes does foolish things. He does not usually act the way that he did in the swamp the day that the turtles fell into the pond. Yertle has a lot of responsibilities and is under a lot of stress. Creatures in this condition sometimes act mean. The jurors should understand that a king's life is difficult and they should not create more problems for poor Yertle. Or for the other turtles in the pond. Any money paid to Sadie will have to come out of the national treasury, Yertle's only source of wealth. Do the people want their taxes to pay for Sadie's injury?

Below are a copy of the jurors notebook pages, they will be printed off separately.



 Yertle the Turtle's Jury

 Trial Notebook

 Plaintiff—Sadie

 Defendant—Yertle

 Jurors Name:

 You will be responsible for determining:

 (1) Whether the witnesses are telling the truth.

 (2) Whether what they say is important to the case.

 (3) Whether they are accurate when they give their information.

Jurors conclusions: compare the testimony of the witnesses:
Do the facts fit together?

Was one side more reasonable than the other?

Are you persuaded that a king may be held responsible for his actions?

Do you think that this king should be in this situation?

Your verdict must be unanimous.

If you determine that the king will be held responsible, you must decide what he must do to compensate for Sadie's alleged injury.

Notes from the Plaintiffs side

Mack

George Snapper

Yolanda

Lynn Lizard

Sadie

Slither

Notes from Defenses side

Mertle

Dr. Sam

Yertle

Hector

Frank Flycatcher