



Courtroom Journalist Contest

The Courtroom Journalist Contest allows students to experience a courtroom setting from the perspective of a news reporter and learn about the American legal system from actual judges and attorneys. Through the voice of a newspaper reporter reporting on a criminal case, students observe and report on their schools mock trials. Student's have 24 hours to submit an article depicting the courtroom drama. <http://www.crf-usa.org/mock-trial-los-angeles/courtroom-journalist-competition.html>

Official Rules

1. All contestants must be affiliated with a participating team and enrolled at the team's school.
2. All participants must complete the entry form.
3. All participants must sign a code of ethics promising to work independently on the contest entry.
4. All participants must sign a release form authorizing the publication or reprinting of their Journalism Contest submissions for educational purposes. No financial compensation will be awarded.
5. Contestants may only watch and report on their team's trials.
6. All contestants are invited to watch their team's first trial during Round 1, **but all contestants must write their articles based on their team's Round 2 trial.**
7. All contestants must wear a "press badge," as provided by ACOE at check-in.
8. During the trials, all contestants must sit in the jury box in a row below the scorers. If a scorer or the Presiding Judge asks you not to sit in the jury box, you may sit in the front row of spectator seating, away from witnesses.
9. Please introduce yourself to the scorers (they will be sitting in the jury box) and the Presiding Judge (she/he will be sitting on the bench).
10. Once you are seated, you **MAY NOT HAVE ANY CONTACT WITH ANYONE FROM YOUR SCHOOL** (parents, teachers, or fellow students).
11. All contestants will have 24 hours to complete their articles and deliver them to ACOE by facsimile, email or hand-delivery by 5:00 p.m. the day following Competition Round 2.
12. Typed submissions must be a **12 point Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins, double-spaced, and a page limit of two pages.** Any articles over two pages will not be read. If submission is handwritten, article must not exceed 500 words.
13. Submitted articles should be in the voice of a reporter covering a criminal trial.
14. Use of dictionaries and thesauruses will be permitted.
15. Contestants may refer to the California Mock Trial case materials, the Journalism Contest rules and judging criteria during the contest.
16. Awards for the Journalism Contest are independent of the County Mock Trial Competition; an individual may win a Journalism award regardless of the Mock Trial team's final ranking.

http://www.crf-usa.org/images/docs/mt_journalism_rules.doc



Mock Trial Competition Sample Journalism Competition Article (courtesy of CRF)

Nick Martin

Central City High School

RIVERSIDE — Following a tense two-hour trial Saturday at the Riverside County Courthouse, Pikesville resident Jesse Woodson was convicted of assaulting an 18-year-old high school student with a deadly weapon, during a confrontation last March.

The victim, Jane Smith, had difficulty adjusting to Pikesville after moving from out of state. She was involved in a series of conflicts with a group of her fellow students, and lodged complaints with the school concerning the group for acts of bullying and harassment both at school and online.

Smith's woes escalated on Feb. 21 when she interrupted a burglary in her home, resulting in one of the trespassers grabbing her hair and threatening to "brick her good." Smith testified that the voice sounded like Woodson's.

According to the prosecution, on March 13 Woodson, 29, followed Smith to an alley on her way home from school and attempted to prevent her from speaking about the break-in by smashing the back of her head with a brick found nearby, leaving her unconscious for two days.

In a passionate summation, prosecuting attorney Emily Robinson underscored the strength of the government's case. "Our evidence is as solid as the weapon in this case," Robinson said. "To assault someone is criminal, but for an adult to hit a young female with a brick is simply



unforgivable.”

In response, the defense attempted to cast doubt on the certainty of the government’s case, offering one of Smith’s classmates as an alternative suspect and positing that the left-handed injury could not have been made by the right-handed Woodson, according to forensic pathologist and defense expert witness Dr. Brooke Crane.

“There is a difference between storytellers and tellers of stories,” said defense attorney Miles Cook in his summation. “A storyteller knows what to leave out. Unfortunately for the prosecution, we know what they wanted to leave out of this trial and we did not allow them to keep it from the court.”

The key piece of incriminating evidence linking Woodson to the crime was brick dust matching the assault weapon found under the defendant’s nails and on her hips by the lead detective on the case, Frankie Cooper.

In a pre-trial motion, the defense attempted to have the dust sample removed from evidence, arguing that police failed to follow proper procedures. After a rebuttal by prosecuting attorney Kenna Little, the motion was dismissed.

Interviewed following the bench trial, Judge Brian Hill explained, “The evidence was overwhelming. I think it was probably a mistake to put Woodson on the stand, but I’m sure his lawyers felt they had no choice but to give it a try.”

No date has been set for sentencing.



Journalism Judging Score Sheet

Judges Name: _____

Entry #: _____

Did the reporter:

Score

1. Find the most newsworthy developments that occurred during the portion of the trial on which she/he was reporting?
(40%) Score 0 to 4 _____
2. Strive for fairness and accuracy
(15%) Score 0 to 2 _____
3. Present the story in clear, concise language?
(10%) Score 0 to 2 _____
4. Develop a simple, easy-to-understand lead paragraph?
(5%) Score 0 to 1 _____
5. Properly structure the story with the most important elements early in the article?
(5%) Score 0 to 1 _____
6. Understand the legal procedures and rulings that were used in the judicial process?
(5%) Score 0 to 1 _____
7. Show the background on the basic elements of the case? (who, what, where, when, why, and how)?
(5%) Score 0 to 1 _____
8. Make the essay interesting by using direct quotes from testimony or descriptions of the courtroom scene, participants or their behavior?
(5%) Score 0 to 1 _____
8. Spell words and names correctly?
(5%) Score 0 to 1 _____
9. Use correct grammar?
(5%) Score 0 to 1 _____
10. Have a headline and dateline?
(5%) Score 0 to 1 _____

TOTAL _____