Name: _____ Date: _____

A Court Where You Can Speak for Yourself

Circle group

Say a neighbor borrows your ladder and breaks it. Your neighbor will not pay for a new one. A lawyer would cost much more than the ladder. So you might just give up. Small claims court is made for problems like this. It is a part of the court system. It hears disputes over small amounts of money. Each state sets the limit.

The process is made to be simple. The person who starts the case is called the plaintiff. The plaintiff fills out a short form and pays a small fee. The person who is asked to pay is called the defendant. The defendant gets a notice and a chance to answer. In many places, people may speak for themselves. The rules are relaxed, so a person with no legal training can still explain what happened.

On the day of the hearing, each side tells a judge or a court officer what happened. Evidence matters. It helps to bring receipts, photographs, or messages that back up your story. A good speaker stays calm, sticks to the facts, and answers questions. Then the judge decides who is right and how much, if anything, should be paid.

Winning does not always mean the money shows up. A judgment is a decision. The winner may still need to take more steps to collect. Even so, small claims court gives people a fair place to settle a dispute without a huge bill. That is part of equal justice.

Questions

1. What kind of cases does small claims court hear?

_____

_____

2. Who is the plaintiff?

_____

_____

3. What evidence might help a person at a hearing?

_____

_____

4. Who sets the limit on the money in a small claims case?

_____

_____

5. Why might a person with a broken ladder give up instead of hiring a lawyer?

_____

_____

6. Why might winning not mean the money shows up right away?

_____

_____

Words to know

plaintiff: the person who starts a case in court
defendant: the person who is asked to answer in a court case
evidence: facts and proof that show something is true
judgment: the official decision a judge makes in a case
dispute: a disagreement between people

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

A Court Where You Can Speak for Yourself

Triangle group

Suppose a neighbor borrows your ladder, breaks it, and refuses to pay for a new one. Hiring a lawyer to sue would cost far more than the ladder, so you might simply give up. Small claims court exists to handle problems like this one. It is a part of the court system that hears disputes over relatively small amounts of money, and the limit is set by each state.

The process is designed to be simple. The person who starts the case, called the plaintiff, fills out a short form and pays a modest filing fee. The person who is being asked to pay, called the defendant, receives notice and has a chance to respond. In many places, people are allowed to speak for themselves, and the rules are relaxed so that a person with no legal training can still explain what happened.

On the day of the hearing, each side tells a judge or a court officer its version of events. Evidence matters, so it helps to bring receipts, photographs, or messages that support your story. A good presenter stays calm, sticks to the facts, and answers questions directly. After listening, the judge decides who is right and how much, if anything, should be paid.

Winning does not always mean the money arrives on its own. A judgment is a decision, and the winner may still have to take further steps to collect. Even so, small claims court gives ordinary people a fair place to settle a dispute without a huge bill, which is an important part of equal justice.

Questions

1. What kind of cases does small claims court hear?

_____

_____

2. Who is the plaintiff?

_____

_____

3. What kinds of evidence might help a person at a hearing?

_____

_____

4. Who sets the limit on how much money a small claims case can involve?

_____

_____

5. Why might a person with a broken ladder give up instead of hiring a lawyer?

_____

_____

6. Why might winning not mean the money arrives right away?

_____

_____

Words to know

plaintiff: the person who starts a case in court
defendant: the person who is asked to answer in a court case
evidence: facts and proof that show something is true
judgment: the official decision a judge makes in a case
dispute: a disagreement between people

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

A Court Where You Can Speak for Yourself

Square group

Suppose that a neighbor borrows your ladder, damages it beyond repair, and then refuses to pay for a replacement. Hiring an attorney to file a lawsuit would cost considerably more than the ladder itself, so you might be tempted to abandon the matter altogether. Small claims court exists precisely to address problems of this kind. It is a division of the court system that hears disputes over relatively modest sums of money, and the maximum amount is established separately by each state.

The procedure is deliberately designed to be straightforward. The person who initiates the case, known as the plaintiff, completes a brief form and pays a modest filing fee. The person who is being asked to pay, known as the defendant, receives formal notice and is given an opportunity to respond. In many places, individuals are permitted to speak on their own behalf, and the rules are relaxed so that a person with no legal training can still explain what happened.

On the day of the hearing, each side presents its version of events to a judge or a court officer. Evidence is important, so it helps to bring receipts, photographs, or messages that support your account. An effective presenter remains calm, sticks to the facts, and answers questions directly. After listening carefully, the judge determines who is in the right and how much money, if any, ought to be paid.

Winning does not always mean the money arrives automatically. A judgment is merely a decision, and the winner may still have to take additional steps in order to collect. Even so, small claims court offers ordinary people a fair place to settle a dispute without running up an enormous bill, which is an essential part of equal justice.

Questions

1. What kind of cases does small claims court hear?

_____

_____

2. Who is the plaintiff?

_____

_____

3. What kinds of evidence might support a person's account at a hearing?

_____

_____

4. Who establishes the maximum amount a small claims case may involve?

_____

_____

5. Why might a person with a damaged ladder abandon the matter instead of hiring an attorney?

_____

_____

6. Why might winning not mean the money arrives automatically?

_____

_____

Words to know

plaintiff: the person who starts a case in court
defendant: the person who is asked to answer in a court case
evidence: facts and proof that show something is true
judgment: the official decision a judge makes in a case
dispute: a disagreement between people

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: A Court Where You Can Speak for Yourself

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: A Court Where You Can Speak for Yourself

Easier · 245 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3.6

1. Disputes over small amounts of money.
2. The person who starts the case.
3. Receipts, photographs, or messages that back up the story.
4. Each state.
5. A lawyer would cost much more than the ladder.
6. A judgment is only a decision, and the winner may need to take more steps to collect.

Triangle: A Court Where You Can Speak for Yourself

This passage · 261 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 7.5

1. Disputes over relatively small amounts of money.
2. The person who starts the case.
3. Receipts, photographs, or messages that support the story.
4. Each state.
5. A lawyer would cost far more than the ladder is worth.
6. A judgment is only a decision, and the winner may need to take further steps to collect.

Square: A Court Where You Can Speak for Yourself

Harder · 290 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 10.9

1. Disputes over relatively modest sums of money.
2. The person who initiates the case.
3. Receipts, photographs, or messages.
4. Each state, separately.
5. An attorney would cost considerably more than the ladder itself.
6. A judgment is merely a decision, and the winner may have to take additional steps in order to collect.