

# Learning about the Courts



# THE COURTS AND WHAT THEY DO

## A Letter from the Chief Judge of the State of New York



Welcome!

I'm so happy you're learning about New York's courts. New York has many different types of courts across the state. All of our courts have one thing in common: they solve problems. When people or businesses have a disagreement, or when someone breaks the law, the courts help find a solution. Millions of cases come through New York's court system each year.

I love working as a judge because I get to learn new things and help people every day. If you would like to work in New York's courts too, there are many wonderful career paths you could choose from. For example:

- If you are friendly and like helping people, you might like to be a court officer. Court officers greet everyone who comes to court, and they make sure everyone who comes to court stays safe.
  - If you like observing people and are good with details, you might like to be a court reporter. Court reporters type everything that gets said in a courtroom, so we have an accurate record of what happened in case we need to review it later.
  - If you are good with languages, you might like to be an interpreter. Interpreters make sure everyone who comes to court understands what is being said in the courtroom—no matter what language they speak.
  - If you like helping people stand up for their rights, you might like to be a lawyer. Lawyers come to court to help their clients tell their stories and make sure that their clients are treated fairly in court.
  - And if you like helping people solve their problems, you might like being a judge—like me! It is my job to understand what the law is and to apply it in every case that I decide.
- I urge you to learn everything you can about how our government works while you are in school. Learn about how we did things in the past. Think hard about how we can improve things in the future. By learning everything you can now, you will be better able to make changes when it is your turn to lead the state and the nation. The future belongs to you!

Warmly,

Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson

## Court of Appeals



## Surrogate's Court

**Surrogate's Court**  
Surrogate's Court handles all matters relating to the estates of people who have died, as well as guardianships and adoptions.

**County Court**

**County Court**  
A County court exists in each county of the state outside New York City. County courts handle felony criminal cases and some civil cases with claims that do not exceed \$25,000.

**Appellate Division of Supreme Court**

The Appellate Division is the intermediate appellate court of the state. It handles appeals in civil and criminal cases. The Appellate Division is divided geographically into four departments.

**Supreme Court**

**Supreme Court** is the statewide trial court covering both criminal and civil cases. It can hear any type of case brought before it, except for claims against the state. The Supreme Court is divided into 13 judicial districts statewide.

**Local Courts**

**NYC Civil Court**  
The NYC Civil Court has jurisdiction over civil matters involving amounts that do not exceed \$50,000.

**NYC Criminal Court**  
The NYC Criminal Court has jurisdiction over criminal matters at the initial stages and handles both misdemeanors and violations to disposition.

**Housing Court**  
Housing Court handles landlord-tenant matters and cases involving housing code violations. There are housing courts in New York City and Buffalo.

**Small Claims Court**  
Small Claims Court handles cases brought by individuals for amounts up to \$10,000. This court is designed to make it easier for a person to sue for small amounts of money without having to be represented by an attorney.

**Town, Village and City Courts**  
There are almost 1,300 Town, Village and City Courts in New York State outside of New York City. These courts have jurisdiction over criminal matters at the initial stages and handle both misdemeanors and violations. These courts also handle vehicle and traffic offenses, civil matters and landlord-tenant cases when there is no housing court in that location.

**Court of Claims**

**Court of Claims**  
The Court of Claims hears cases brought against the State of New York or certain state entities.

**Family Court**

**Family Court**  
Family court handles matters involving families and children. It hears matters involving young people between ages of 7 and 18, who are charged with offenses that would be a crime if committed by an adult. It also handles cases involving adoption, guardianships, foster care, domestic violence, child protection, custody, and visitation.

# COMMON COURTROOM TERMS

## LEGAL TERMS

### **Accomplice**

Someone who helps another person commit a crime

### **Acquittal**

Decision reached by a jury, based on all the evidence presented at a criminal trial, that the defendant has not been proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt

### **Arraignment**

In criminal cases, the appearance by a person charged with a crime before the judge to enter a plea

### **Assigned Counsel**

Lawyer appointed by the court to represent a person who cannot afford to pay a lawyer

### **Bench Warrant**

Order issued by a judge for the arrest of a person who fails to appear in court

### **Booking**

Process of photographing, fingerprinting, and recording information about a person following their arrest

### **Contract**

Agreement between two people, usually involving payment for goods, services, or real estate

### **Cross Examination**

Questions posed to a witness who has testified for the other side

### **Damages**

Money awarded by a court to a person injured by the unlawful act or negligence of another party

### **Discovery**

Legal process which takes place before a trial, where one party learns what evidence the opposing party will introduce during the trial

### **Docket**

List of cases to be heard by a court

### **Exhibit**

Document or article used as evidence during a trial or court hearing

### **Felony**

Serious crime, such as robbery or assault with a deadly weapon, for which the punishment is a prison sentence of at least one year

### **Grand Jury**

Group of citizens assembled to hear evidence and consider allegations of criminal behavior and decide if there is enough evidence to charge the party under investigation with a crime

### **Hung Jury**

Jury that cannot agree upon a verdict

### **Miranda Warning**

Before questioning suspects, the police warn people in custody of their constitutional rights to remain silent and to have an attorney

### **Misdemeanor**

Less serious crime, such as trespassing, for which the punishment is generally a fine or up to a year in jail

### **Motive**

Reason why a person commits an act

### **Parole**

Release from state prison after serving part of a sentence, with supervision by a parole officer

### **Plaintiff**

Person who starts a civil lawsuit

### **Plea**

Defendant's declaration in open court that they are guilty or not guilty

### **Probable Cause**

Sufficient legal basis for allowing the search and seizure of evidence or arrest of a person

### **Prosecutor**

A lawyer who represents the government in a criminal case

### **Search Warrant**

Written order issued by a judge to search a specific area for evidence of a crime

### **Sentence**

Punishment ordered by the court for a person found guilty of a crime

### **Testimony**

Evidence given by a witness under oath

### **Transcript**

Official record of all the testimony and exhibits presented during a court proceeding

### **Verdict**

Jury's decision, reached after it has considered all evidence presented during the trial



## COURTROOM AND STAFF

### **Bench**

Judge's desk, usually raised, where the judge sits while presiding in the courtroom

### **Chambers**

Private office of a judge

### **Court Clerk**

Person who reviews court documents, swears in witnesses, and makes sure trial evidence is safely kept

### **Court Interpreter**

Person fluent in another language who translates for witnesses, defendants, and other court users who do not speak or understand English

### **Court Officer**

Peace officer who maintains order and provides security in the courtroom

### **Court Reporter**

Person trained to record word-for-word the testimony and discussions that take place during a court proceeding

### **Judge**

Public official who oversees court trials and hearings, sentences offenders, and issues court orders and decisions

# FUN FACTS ABOUT **NEW** YORK

**6 BORDER STATES**  
Connecticut,  
Massachusetts,  
New Jersey,  
Pennsylvania,  
Vermont & shares  
a water border with  
Rhode Island



**NY CAPITAL**  
Albany

**NICKNAMES**  
Empire State

**MOTTO**  
Excelsior  
(Ever Upward)

**11TH STATE**  
NY Gained  
Statehood  
July 26, 1788

**STATE BIRD**  
Bluebird

**STATE FLOWER**  
Rose

**STATE FRUIT**  
Apple

**STATE TREE**  
Sugar Maple

**STATE ANIMAL**  
Beaver

**STATE SONG**  
"I Love  
New York"

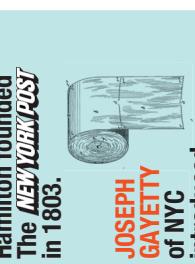
**LARGEST CITIES IN NY:**  
New York,  
Buffalo,  
Rochester,  
Yonkers &  
Syracuse

**NY hosted the  
1<sup>ST</sup> US CHESS  
TOURNAMENT  
in 1843**



Lombardi's / 1905.

**NY HAS THE OLDEST  
RUNNING NEWSPAPER  
IN THE US!** Alexander  
Hamilton founded  
The *NEW YORK POST*  
in 1803.



**JOSEPH GAYETTY**  
of NYC introduced  
toilet paper  
to the United States  
in 1857.



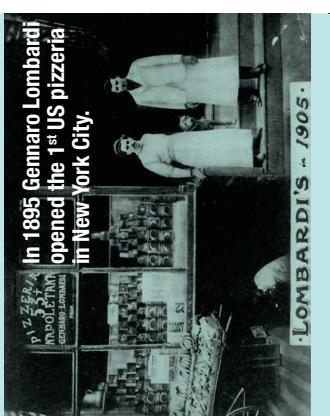
**30<sup>TH</sup> LARGEST  
STATE IN THE US!**  
NY is 47,224  
square miles

**4<sup>TH</sup> MOST  
POPULATED  
STATE IN THE US!**

2020 Census:  
Pop. 20,201,249

In 1901 NY was  
the 1<sup>st</sup> state to  
require **LICENSE  
PLATES** for cars  
which were home-  
made until 1910!

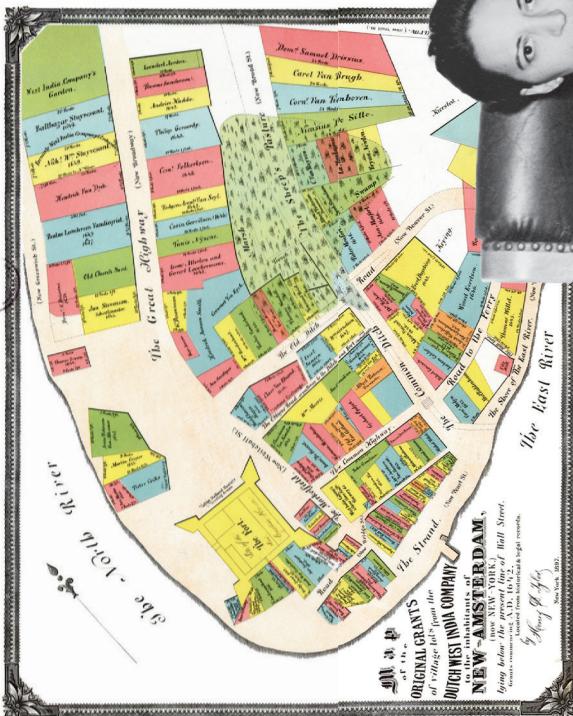
**The OLDEST CATTLE  
RANCH** in the US was  
started in 1747  
Montauk, Long Island.



# DID YOU KNOW?

The first court in what is now New York State was created in 1653  
in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam (now Manhattan).

New York City was the seat of the major colonial and state courts  
until 1797, when the capital was moved to Albany.

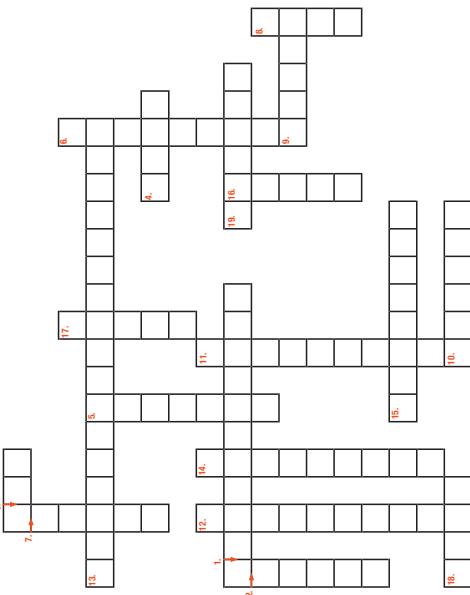


Jane Bolin was the first African American  
woman to graduate from Yale Law School  
and the first African American woman to  
serve as a judge in the U.S. In 1939, she was  
appointed to New York's Domestic Relations  
Court (now called family court), where she  
served until her retirement in 1978.



# SOLVE THE CASE

**Use the word bank to complete the puzzle and paragraph below**



A criminal case begins with the defendant's **1. \_\_\_\_\_**. The accused is brought before the court for **2. \_\_\_\_\_** on the charge. During the arraignment, the accused is informed of the charge and advised of his or her right to a **3. \_\_\_\_\_**. If a defendant cannot afford to **4. \_\_\_\_\_** an attorney and requests one, the court will **5. \_\_\_\_\_** a lawyer to **6. \_\_\_\_\_** the defendant without cost to the defendant or defendant's family. In New York State, **7. \_\_\_\_\_** enforcement officials must bring an arrested person before the court for arraignment within 24 hours. During arraignment, a defendant can plead not guilty. If a not guilty **8. \_\_\_\_\_** plea is entered, the case is set down for **9. \_\_\_\_\_** at a later date. If a **10. \_\_\_\_\_** must establish the defendant's guilt **11. \_\_\_\_\_**. The defendant does not have to doubt, producing relevant **12. \_\_\_\_\_** and other **13. \_\_\_\_\_** on his or her own behalf. Based on all the **14. \_\_\_\_\_** of the case, the **15. \_\_\_\_\_** will decide whether or not the defendant is guilty. If found not guilty, the accused is set free. If found guilty, the defendant will come back to court for sentencing. After sentencing, the defendant has the right to **16. \_\_\_\_\_** to a higher court.

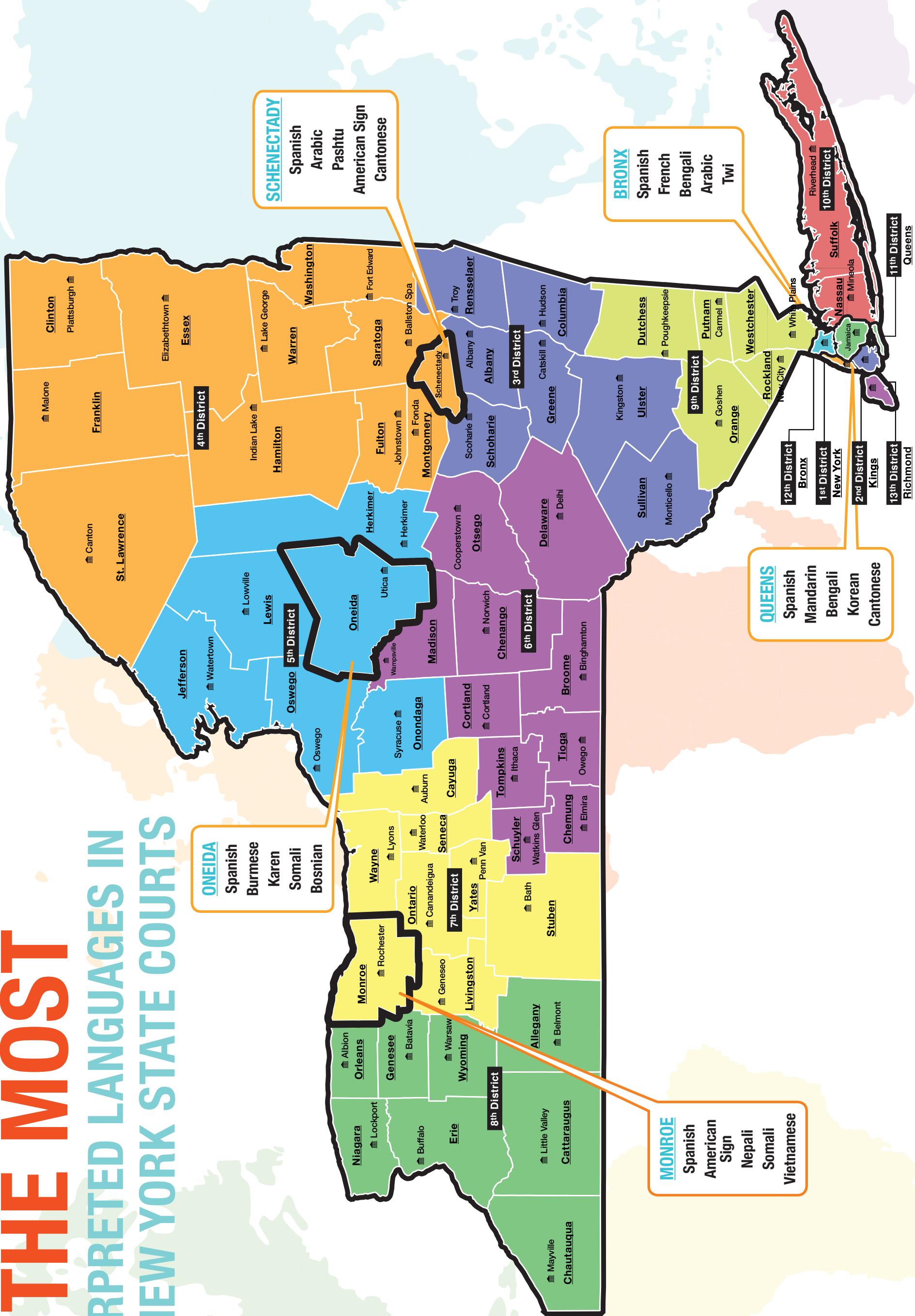
## WORD BANK

Beyond a reasonable Evidence Facts	Guilty	Lawyer	Represent Sentencing Trial
Appeal	Hire	Plea	Witnesses
Appoint	Jury	Proof	
Arrest	Law	Prosecutor	

## PURSUIT OF JUSTICE QUIZ

- The person who sits in the courtroom and makes a word-for-word record is the ...  
a. File clerk  
b. Law clerk  
c. Court reporter
- The person asked to give testimony at a trial is a ...  
a. Prosecutor  
b. Witness  
c. Spectator
- Members of the public assembled by the court to decide a case are called the ...  
a. Litigants  
b. Plaintiffs  
c. Jurors
- An order to have a person arrested and brought to court because they failed to appear for their court date is a ...  
a. Indictment  
b. Bench Warrant  
c. Subpoena
- The number of judges on the New York State Court of Appeals is  
a. 1  
b. 7  
c. 1200
- The highest court in New York State is the ...  
a. Supreme Court  
b. Court of Claims  
c. Court of Appeals
- Another name for the office used by a judge is ...  
a. Closet  
b. Chambers  
c. Deliberation Room
- A subpoena is ...  
a. A document a person gives the police to report a crime.  
b. A document the court gives people to tell them that they must come to court.  
c. A document the jury must use to report its decision.

# THE MOST INTERPRETED LANGUAGES IN THE NEW YORK STATE COURTS



# COURT FILL-IN

Use the word bank below to complete each of these sentences.

- Every criminal defendant is \_\_\_\_\_ until proven guilty.
- Every criminal defendant is entitled to be represented by an \_\_\_\_\_.
- Witnesses take an \_\_\_\_\_ and swear to tell the truth.
- At a trial, attorneys use witnesses to present \_\_\_\_\_ to the jury.
- After the jury deliberates, the jury foreperson will be asked to announce the \_\_\_\_\_.
- When the judge tells the defendant the amount of time that the defendant must go to jail, the judge pronounces the \_\_\_\_\_.
- A civil suit is started when a \_\_\_\_\_ files a complaint.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ is the attorney who represents the government in a criminal trial.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ is the highest court in New York State.
- A felony is a more serious crime than a \_\_\_\_\_.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ hears cases relating to the property of individuals who have passed away.
- The official record of court proceedings is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
- A judge's private office is called \_\_\_\_\_.
- If the judge has a research question, the judge can ask his law \_\_\_\_\_ for help.
- The highest court of the State of New York is not a trial court; instead it's an \_\_\_\_\_ court.

## WORD BANK

Appellate Attorney Chambers	Misdemeanor Oath Sentence	Court of Appeals Clerk Surrogate's Court	Transcript Prosecutor Plaintiff	Verdict Testimony Innocent
-----------------------------	---------------------------	--	---------------------------------	----------------------------

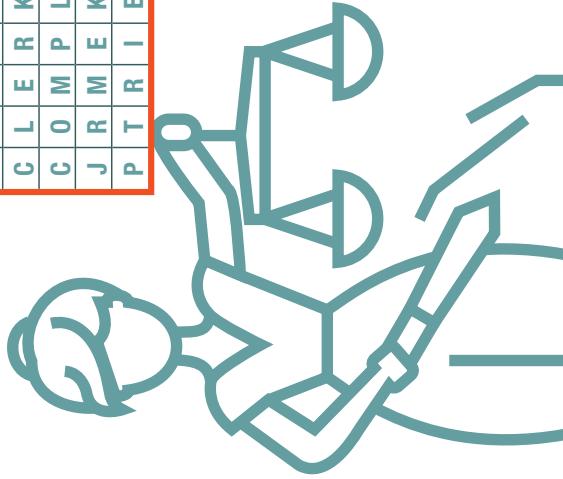


# SEARCH FOR JUSTICE!

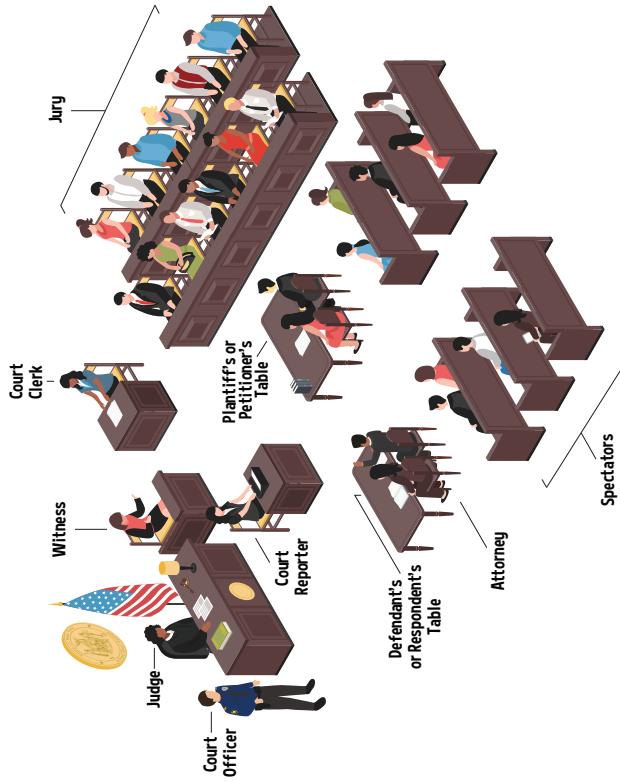
The words below are in the word search puzzle, written across and up-and-down.  
How many of the words can you find?

## WORD BANK

T A D E L I B E R A T I O N	R E S I P E G A V E L N P	U W V N R C J D E C B A I L
R E S I P E G A V E L N P	T I A H O N D U N D A E N A	U W V N R C J D E C B A I L
U W V N R C J D E C B A I L	C T R O S E L J R E L P A U	T I A H O N D U N D A E N A
T I A H O N D U N D A E N A	J N D N E D L O N Y O P A R	C T R O S E L J R E L P A U
C T R O S E L J R E L P A U	U E I E C I I W A R R A N T	J N D N E D L O N Y O P A R
J N D N E D L O N Y O P A R	D S C S U V E R D I C T M E	U E I E C I I W A R R A N T
U E I E C I I W A R R A N T	G S E N T E N C I N G N I T	D S C S U V E R D I C T M E
G S E N T E N C I N G N I T	Y E N R O T T A C A S E	G S E N T E N C I N G N I T
Y E N R O T T A C A S E	O C U O R T O R D E R D T S	Y E N R O T T A C A S E
O C U O R T O R D E R D T S	A O A T H T I H O N O N R T	O C U O R T O R D E R D T S
A O A T H T I H O N O N R T	C L E R K A P P O I N E I	A O A T H T I H O N O N R T
C L E R K A P P O I N E I	C O M P L A I N T F F A F	C L E R K A P P O I N E I
C O M P L A I N T F F A F	J R M E K D T E B O S E L Y	C O M P L A I N T F F A F
J R M E K D T E B O S E L Y	P T R I E S E G A M A D E R	J R M E K D T E B O S E L Y

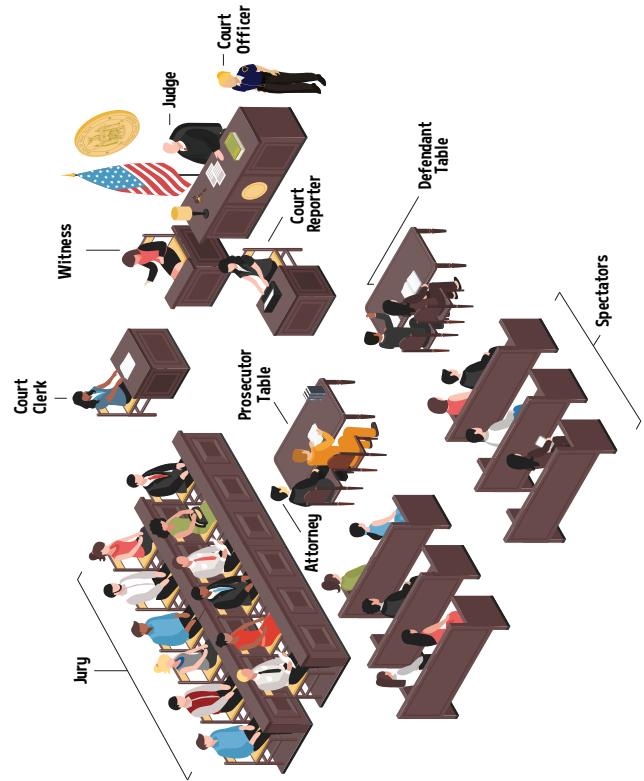


# CIVIL COURT



ENGLISH	SPANISH	FRENCH
Judge	Juez	Juge
Court Clerk	Escríbano	Greffier
Court Officer	Oficial del Orden Público	Auxiliaire de Justice
Court Reporter	Taquígrafo/a	Sténographe
Court Interpreter	Intérprete judicial	Interprète Judiciaire
Juror	Jurado	Juré
Petitioner	Demandante	Pétitionnaire
Plaintiff	Demandante	Plaignante(s)
Respondent	Demandado	Répondant(e)
Defendant	Acusado	Prévenu(e)
Prosecutor	Fiscal	Procureur
Defense Attorney	Abogado defensor	Avocat(e) de la Défense

# CRIMINAL COURT



ENGLISH	SPANISH	FRENCH
Judge	Juez	Juge
Court Clerk	Escríbano	Greffier
Court Officer	Oficial del Orden Público	Auxiliaire de Justice
Court Reporter	Taquígrafo/a	Sténographe
Court Interpreter	Intérprete judicial	Interprète Judiciaire
Juror	Jurado	Juré
Petitioner	Demandante	Pétitionnaire
Plaintiff	Demandante	Plaignante(s)
Respondent	Demandado	Répondant(e)
Defendant	Acusado	Prévenu(e)
Prosecutor	Fiscal	Procureur
Defense Attorney	Abogado defensor	Avocat(e) de la Défense

# LETTERS OF THE LAW

Unscramble the vocabulary words listed below

1. CVIIL
2. YRUJ
3. ERIMC
4. HAOT
5. RAITL
6. VLEGA
7. EALPAP
8. GEDUJ
9. RELKC
10. TCRUO
11. REDVITC
12. YNOEM
13. LJAI
14. NORTATYE
15. LIEDBRETAE
16. SWINTSE
17. LYTIUG
18. TENNNCOI
19. HTURT
20. ENSTCEEN

## COURT VOCABULARY MATCH

1. The individual charged with a crime
2. The legal process that uses a jury to determine who wins a lawsuit
3. A person that testifies at trial
4. Lawyer
5. The information presented at trial
6. The place where a trial or appeal takes place
7. To consider all the evidence presented
8. A person who presides over the court
9. The decision of the jury
10. The lawyer who conducts the case in a criminal trial
11. What a defendant is accused of
12. A group of citizens that examines evidence
13. A witness swears to tell the truth
14. The jail term the defendant must serve
15. A type of case between people, usually over money
16. If the defendant is not innocent
17. The person who brings a civil case
18. Continuing the case to see if the trial result was wrong
19. Assists a judge with court details
20. The paper filed to begin a civil case

## WORD BANK

Appeal	Crime	Judge	Guilty
Attorney	Deliberate	Jail	Jury
Civil	Gavel	Jury	Truth
Clerk	Guilty	Money	Verdict
Court	Innocent	Oath	Witness

## WORD BANK

Appeal	Court	Guilty
Attorney	Crime	Judge
Civil	Defendant	Jury
Clerk	Deliberate	Oath
Court	Evidence	Prosecutor

# MYSTERY WORDS?

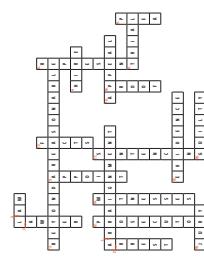
1. Solve the math problems.
2. Then use the chart below to find the correct letter.  
Example:  $8 + 6 = 14 = \text{N}$ .
3. Then use the letters to find the Mystery Words.

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
 5 + 4 & = & \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \\
 11 - 8 & = & \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \\
 26 - 4 & = & \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \\
 6 + 6 & = & \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \\
 10 - 1 & = & \underline{\hspace{2cm}}
 \end{array}
 \quad
 \begin{array}{rcl}
 10 + 5 + 5 & = & \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \\
 8 + 7 & = & \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \\
 13 + 5 & = & \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \\
 18 + 3 & = & \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \\
 17 - 14 & = & \underline{\hspace{2cm}}
 \end{array}$$

1=A	2=B	3=C	4=D	5=E	6=F
7=G	8=H	9=I	10=J	11=K	12=L
13=M	14=N	15=O	16=P	17=Q	18=R
19=S	20=T	21=U	22=V	23=W	24=X
25=Y	26=Z				

# ANSWER KEY

## SOLVE THE CASE



## SEARCH FOR JUSTICE!

THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE QUIZ	
1. <b>C. COURT REPORTER</b> - The Court Reporter records all proceedings in the courtroom, including testimony of the witnesses, objections made to evidence by the attorneys, and lists and marks for identification any exhibits that become part of the record.	2. <b>B. WITNESS</b> - A witness is a person who is called to testify before a court on what he has seen, heard or observed.
3. <b>C. JURORS</b> - Jurors are a group of people summoned to appear in court to decide a case.	4. <b>B. BENCH WARRANT</b> - Order issued by a judge for the arrest of a person who fails to appear in court.
A criminal case begins with the defendant's <b>ARREST</b> . The accused is brought before the court for <b>ARRAIGNMENT</b> on the charge. During the arraignment, the accused is informed of the charge and advised of his or her right to a <b>LAWYER</b> . If a defendant cannot afford to <b>HIRE</b> an attorney and requests one, the court will <b>APPOINT</b> a lawyer to <b>REPRESENT</b> the defendant without cost to the defendant or defendant's family.	5. <b>B. 7</b> - There are 7 Judges on the New York State Court of Appeals.
In New York State, <b>LAW</b> enforcement officials must bring an arrested person before the court for arraignment within 24 hours.	6. <b>C. COURT OF APPEALS</b> - The Court of Appeals is the highest court in New York State. It is the court of final resort.
During arraignment, a defendant can plead not guilty. If a not guilty <b>PLEA</b> is entered, the case is set down for <b>TRIAL</b> at a later date.	7. <b>B. HUNG JURY</b> - A hung jury is another term used to describe a deadlocked jury.
If a <b>GUILTY</b> plea is entered, the court sets a <b>SENTENCING</b> date.	8. <b>C. FOREPERSON</b> - The foreperson has the responsibility for speaking for the entire jury. This is the person who presides over the jury's deliberation efforts.
If the case goes to trial, the <b>PROSECUTOR</b> must establish the defendant's guilt <b>Beyond a Reasonable Doubt</b> , producing relevant <b>WITNESSES</b> and other <b>EVIDENCE</b> . The defendant does not have to offer any <b>PROOF</b> on his or her own behalf.	9. <b>B. DEFENDANT</b> - In a criminal case a defendant is the person accused of committing a criminal act.
Based on all the <b>FACTS</b> of the case, the <b>JURY</b> will decide whether or not the defendant is guilty.	10. <b>B. SEARCH WARRANT</b> - A search warrant is an order issued by a judge directing a law enforcement officer to search for, and seize, any property that may serve as evidence.
If found not guilty, the accused is set free. If found guilty, the defendant will come back to court for sentencing.	11. <b>B. STATUTE</b> - A statute is a written law of the legislature declaring, commanding, or prohibiting something.
After sentencing, the defendant has the right to <b>APPEAL</b> to a higher court.	12. <b>C. SETTLEMENT</b> - In a settlement the parties to a case come to an agreement which ends their case.

The MYSTERY WORDS are:

## THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE!

### 1. C. COURT REPORTER

1. **C. COURT REPORTER** - The Court Reporter records all proceedings in the courtroom, including testimony of the witnesses, objections made to evidence by the attorneys, and lists and marks for identification any exhibits that become part of the record.
2. **B. WITNESS** - A witness is a person who is called to testify before a court on what he has seen, heard or observed.
3. **C. JURORS** - Jurors are a group of people summoned to appear in court to decide a case.
4. **B. BENCH WARRANT** - Order issued by a judge for the arrest of a person who fails to appear in court.

## LETTERS OF THE LAW

5. **B. 7** - There are 7 Judges on the New York State Court of Appeals.
6. **C. COURT OF APPEALS** - The Court of Appeals is the highest court in New York State. It is the court of final resort.
7. **B. HUNG JURY** - A hung jury is another term used to describe a deadlocked jury.
8. **C. FOREPERSON** - The foreperson has the responsibility for speaking for the entire jury. This is the person who presides over the jury's deliberation efforts.
9. **B. DEFENDANT** - In a criminal case a defendant is the person accused of committing a criminal act.
10. **B. SEARCH WARRANT** - A search warrant is an order issued by a judge directing a law enforcement officer to search for, and seize, any property that may serve as evidence.

## COURT VOCABULARY MATCH

11. **C. VERDICT**
12. **B. MONEY**
13. **A. JAIL**
14. **D. CRIME**
15. **E. ATTORNEY**
16. **F. DELIBERATE**
17. **G. WITNESS**
18. **H. INNOCENT**
19. **I. DEBUNK**
20. **J. SENTENCE**
1. Defendant
2. Trial
3. Witness
4. Attorney
5. Evidence
6. Court
7. Deliberate
8. Judge
9. Verdict
10. Prosecutor
11. Crime
12. Jury
13. Oath
14. Sentence
15. Court
16. Guilty
17. Plaintiff
18. Appeal
19. Clerk
20. Complaint

## COURT FILL-IN

1. **I. INNOCENT**
2. **B. CHAMBERS** - The chambers is a judge's private office which the judge uses when not on the bench.
3. **A. OATH**
4. **D. TESTIMONY**
5. **V. VERDICT**
6. **S. SENTENCE**
7. **P. PLAINTIFF**
8. **R. PROSECUTOR**
9. **C. VERDICT**
10. **M. MISDEMEANOR**
11. **S. SURROGATE'S COURT**
12. **T. TRANSCRIPT**
13. **C. CHAMBERS**
14. **C. CLERK**
15. **A. APPELLATE**



**THANK YOU TO:**

Office of Public Affairs, Melanie Sue

Office of Public Information, Arlene Hackel

Office of Language Access, Ann Ryan

Unified Court System's Graphics and Print Department