# Athenian Popular Courts: Lesson Plan

## Topic

The Athenian popular law courts, or the *dikasteria*, were the signature institution of democratic Athens where citizens argued legal disputes in front of juries of their peers to resolve disputes in a fair, democratic manner. It was an overwhelmingly amateur system with no judges, no state prosecutors, no lawyers, and no police officers.

## Possible subjects/classes

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<th>Time needed</th>
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<td>30-45 minutes</td>
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- Government
- History
- Politics
- Philosophy

## Video link:

https://academy4sc.org/video/athenian-popular-courts-democracy-in-action/

## Objective: What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?

Students will be able to...

- Identify features of the Athenian Popular Courts that were democratic
- Outline the process that led up to a jury trial
- Describe the role of the jury as well as how juries were formed

## Key Concepts & Vocabulary

Jury, litigant, plaintiff, defendant, magistrate

## Materials Needed

Worksheet, computers

## Before you watch

**Turn & Talk:** Have students discuss the following questions in small groups: What is jury duty? Who is eligible to serve on a jury? How does someone get picked for jury duty? What is the role of a jury?
**While you watch**

Complete the “While you watch” section of the worksheet.

**After you watch/discussion questions**

1. How does the Athenian notion of justice compare to modern notions of justice? What seem to be strengths and weaknesses of each?
2. Do you think a legal system run by amateurs or experts is more inclined to deliver justice? How might you explain the Athenians’ preference for amateurism?
3. How did the popular courts in Athens align with Athenian democratic values?

**Activity Ideas**

- **Compare & Contrast:** Have students write a short essay comparing and contrasting the Athenian popular courts with the American court system, especially paying attention to the role of juries. Give students time to research if necessary.
- **Examine the Evidence:** Have students read the first two sections of Demosthenes 52, “Against Callippus” and instruct them to write down observations of anything that seems interesting, familiar, confusing, or surprising. Discuss in small groups or as a class.
  - [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0080%3Aspeech%3D52%3Asection%3D1](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0080%3Aspeech%3D52%3Asection%3D1) (Section 1)
  - [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0080%3Aspeech%3D52%3Asection%3D2](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0080%3Aspeech%3D52%3Asection%3D2) (Section 2)

**Sources/places to learn more**

