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# Global Warming Trial

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In 2003, thousands of elderly people died of heat stroke in France due to the world's hottest summer on record. In this mock trial, members of a small (imaginary) French community called Le Sandeaux are accusing a large (imaginary) oil company of being responsible for these deaths. They believe that the Alixico Oil Company's fossil fuels are contributing to global warming, causing temperatures to increase rapidly.

Although many people emit dangerous greenhouse gases into the air as they drive their cars, the citizens of Le Sandeaux argue that the oil companies are responsible for selling a deadly product. They compare their situation to that of smokers who have won lawsuits against cigarette vendors. Do the citizens of Le Sandeaux have a case? Can they win their argument that the oil company's products are hazardous to the inhabitants of the Earth, and that therefore the oil company should reimburse the people of Le Sandeaux for the tragic losses they suffered? You decide.

Several people from around the world, including you, have been called to testify and participate in this trial. Participants include the following:

## **The Lawyers and Their Clients**

- Alixico's team of defense attorneys
- The defendant, Dee Oxide, President and CEO of Alixico
- Le Sandeaux's team of prosecuting attorneys
- The plaintiff, Claire D. Air, mayor of Le Sandeaux

## **Witnesses for the Prosecution and the Defense**

- The grandchild of one of the people who died in Le Sandeaux
- A park ranger working in Glacier National Park, Montana
- A cab driver in Great Britain
- An American parent who owns a large truck and drives it 50 miles to work each day
- A leading member of the Russian Academy of Sciences
- The head scientist working for Alixico in Saudi Arabia
- A leading member of the Science Council of Japan
- A manager in a car manufacturing company in Michigan
- A cattle rancher in Argentina
- Al Gore, former vice president of the United States and Nobel Prize winner
- A twenty-year-old in India about to purchase his or her own car for the first time
- A Greenpeace worker in the United States
- A person of your choice, as approved by the teacher

## **Court Personnel**

- The judge
- The bailiff

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# Global Warming Trial (continued)

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## Overview of the Trial

The prosecuting attorneys and the mayor of Le Sandeaux will argue that Alixico Oil Company is guilty of causing global warming, which in turn led to the mass deaths in France in the summer of 2003. The defense attorneys and the defendant will try to prove otherwise.

The witnesses in the case will form their own opinions as to whether they think Alixico is guilty of causing global warming, which ultimately led to the deaths of many Le Sandeaux citizens. However, as you select your role as a witness who will testify about global warming, you should pay special attention to each person's background, because it could potentially inform how that person would think about the issue.

The court personnel, the judge and the bailiff, will try to remain neutral as they listen to the evidence. Furthermore, people from outside of this class (such as other students, teachers, parents, or people in the community) will also try to remain neutral as they weigh the evidence presented to them and decide whether or not Alixico is guilty. They will visit the classroom on the days the trial is presented to deliver a verdict.

Specifically, your jobs are as follows:

### **Lawyers**

- (1) Prepare an opening statement in which you try to convince the jury that your client is right. What is the main argument you are trying to make? What specific evidence supports your argument? What credible scientific sources support your argument?
- (2) After writing your opening statement, prepare a list of witnesses you want to call to the stand. You should try to call witnesses that you think may support your position.
- (3) Prepare a list of questions you would like to ask the witnesses. You do not have to ask the witnesses *all* of these questions, but they can serve as a starting point if you are stuck on what to say.
- (4) After the witnesses have presented their evidence, you should incorporate their comments into a closing statement in which you will again argue that your client is right. Remember, a good argument is one that not only proves your own point, but that also anticipates counter-arguments to your point, and tries to show that your own position is stronger.
- (5) As part of your closing argument, include one other type of representation (other than words) that proves your point. You might include a chart that shows the increased climate of the earth, a video of somebody acting like a scientist who claims that global warming is due to solar variation, and more.

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# Global Warming Trial (continued)

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## Defendants

- (1) Prepare a witness statement in which you try to prove one of two points:
  - *Alixico Oil Company contributed significantly to increased temperatures throughout the world, which in turn led to the deaths of the elderly people in Le Sandeaux. Alixico is guilty!*
  - *Alixico Oil Company's actions did not contribute to the heat wave that caused thousands of deaths across France. Alixico is not guilty!*
- (2) As part of your witness statement, include one artifact that proves your point and would win the jury to your side. You may include a picture of your family that needs the oil company's products to be able to drive to work each morning, a scientific diagram, a journal written by a man who would lose his job if Alixico were shut down, and more.
- (3) As the other witnesses give their statements on the stand, you will take notes on their key points. At the end of the trial, you will act as a jury member who helps the visitors decide on the verdict **solely on the basis of the evidence presented in the trial**, and not based on the witness statement you wrote. Your opinion will help to inform the final decision of the lead jury members, or the people who will visit our classroom on the day of the trial.

## Court Personnel

- (1) Although people usually can't help forming opinions on issues, your job is to remain as neutral and objective as possible. Therefore, whatever your opinion is on the issue, you will be asked to write your persuasive paper taking the opposite perspective. You will fill out a witness statement on this sheet so you can have practice on persuasive writing, even though you will not serve as a witness in the trial.
- (2) Review your lines for the trial, and ask the teacher if you have any questions about them. Together, the two of you will lead the class through the court proceedings.

**Remember, this overview of the trial is just to help you get an overall sense of how the trial is put together. More specific instructions and handouts will be given at the appropriate times as the trial preparation progresses.**