

Students accused of handling stolen goods and being in possession of a knife!...

Eleven students from the junior mock trials team are heading off to nationals!

My experience of being part of the SHS mock trials team so far, by Merissa Lawrence 8S1.



As our previous newsletter article stated, on March 24th, our newly formed 2018 junior team took part in the local heat of the *Magistrates Mock Trial* competition and came home with first place, (and also a McDonalds - shhh don't tell anyone!) THEN, on the 19th of May, we took part in the regional heat of the competition at Mansfield Magistrates court where again, we were lucky enough to win 1st place! I must note that we felt the regional heat was a close one, with other amazing teams; but, our hard

work paid off and we made it out on top. I was shocked but elated that we had just won a place at the nationals since it was my first year ever being on the team. Our team is a mix of students that took part last year (7) and those that are new to the team (4) so there were some déjà vu moments for the experienced students and even a few emotional parents! One thing that had caught my eye, was the shield. Not just the shield itself, but the names on the shield. When I was handed the shield to hold for our team photo, I saw that Springwood High School had been engraved onto the shield as winners for every year but the first! The feeling of pride danced upon me when I knew we had just kept our consecutive record for our school, and our hard work had paid off.

The 16th of June will be our national final which will take place at the famous Victoria Law Courts in Birmingham. I'm feeling partly nervous for my first ever national final but also excited. We only have 2 more weeks left before the competition and so far we've been raising money from sponsorship to cover the costs of staying over in Birmingham the night before the final. We've also been going through both legal criminal cases that we had to present in each round of the competition as for the final we have to present them both! But not all of both of them, just one side of each (prosecution or defence) However we we won't know the selection until the day, so we have been revising everything!

I was selected as a lawyer back in the audition process and plays a Lawyer in the first round and, a Lawyer *and* Magistrate in the second. The first case was about a defendant being in possession of a knife and the second case was a defendant accused of handling stolen goods.

Playing a Lawyer consists of either representing the government (prosecution lawyer) or representing a client who has been accused of something (defence lawyer). It involves performing what is called an 'examination in chief' where I have to ask my witness numerous, open questions in a specific time limit, trying to draw out the facts that are documented from that witness in a statement. This happens with a students from my own team.

However, then there's the really hard bit which is a 'cross examination' where I have to ask questions to a witness on another team and try to discredit his/her statement, also under a strict time limit! Cross examining is difficult as don't know what answer to expect from the witness who is from another school. You need to respond according to the witness' response therefore you can't stick to a script and have to come up with new questions on the spot. Unfortunately it is known for some witnesses to ramble on as a tactic in order to attempt ruin your time limit, and therefore as a lawyer I have to try and get the witness to answer with a yes/no by only asking them closed questions. Contrary to popular belief, lawyers cannot be sarcastic or aggressive to a witness otherwise you will get marked down.

Furthermore, there are lots of formalities that the whole team has to remember. For example you have to refer to those playing the Magistrates as 'your worships', the other lawyers as 'my learned friend' and if you're a Magistrate talking to a fellow Magistrate, you'd say 'my colleague'. When entering court for the competition, like in real life, we have to dress appropriately and sit up straight and say 'excuse me' if you stumbled on a few words all to show respect.

The competition introduces the legal system to young people in an exciting way that has a lasting impact on all those involved as it gives us skills that will be of used throughout our lives such as public speaking. Being part of this team and taking on these competitions has definitely taught me to be more time efficient. Rehearsals have taken place after school, lunchtimes and Sundays. This has meant many of us missing out on other clubs and activities in order to prioritise this activity because if one person is missing, it can effect the people they directly work with. This has taught me how to balance different opportunities and schoolwork and how to make good use of my time.

As Miss Roberts is not in school everyday, we have all communicated and worked lots over email and therefore I've had to ensure I check my emails everyday. I have also learnt how to interact with businesses (local and large corporate ones) when gaining sponsorship. I have seen 3 different court houses (soon to be 4 after the national) and I have learnt how to show respect in court and have met real magistrates and lawyers.

We could not have got this far in the competition without our teacher Miss Roberts. Miss Robert's expertise, knowledge and dedication were all key in order to our winning. She has given up so much of her time for us and we can't thank her enough. Thank you so much for giving us this extraordinary opportunity Miss Roberts.

Merissa Lawrence, 8S1. 03/06/2018