



ROLL OF THUNDER, HEAR MY CRY: THE TRIAL OF T.J. AVERY



At the end of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, T.J. Avery is accused of murder for the incident at the Barnetts' store in Strawberry. According to the Sixth Amendment in the U.S. Bill of Rights, citizens accused of a crime have the right to a speedy and public trial by jury. In T.J.'s trial, there will be two sides—the prosecution and the defense—that will argue to determine whether T.J. is guilty of murder.

Imagine you have been asked to write a letter in support of T.J. Avery before his criminal trial begins. To prepare, consider the information that the defense and prosecution teams might use as evidence to support their argument. Complete the graphic organizer below with evidence from the text.

The **defense** is the team responsible for denying the claims made by the prosecution team in order to defend the accused individual's innocence. They might argue that:

T.J. Avery is **not guilty** because...

- T.J. wanted to leave the mercantile without the pistol, but R.W. and Melvin continued with the robbery. Because he was scared, T.J. stood back and followed their directions, but he was not in the physical struggle with Mr. Barnett.
- R.W. and Melvin Simms covered their faces and hands so they'd be unrecognizable, which left T.J. to be the only one that the Barnetts could see and blame.
- T.J. never held the axe that hit Mr. Barnett on the head.

The **prosecution** is the team responsible for presenting the case against the individual accused of breaking the law. They might argue that:

T.J. Avery is **guilty** because...

- Mrs. Barnett saw the skin color of the person who hit Mr. Barnett.
- T.J. returned to town with injuries he must have received from struggling with Mr. Barnett in the mercantile.
- T.J. had been to the store several times before where he admired the pearl-handled pistol, so he was there to steal it and fought Mr. Barnett when he was caught.

On a separate sheet of paper, write a letter to the court from a character's point of view. Include the following information in your letter:

- Explain who you are and how you know T.J. Avery.
- Explain why T.J. Avery is innocent and how the trial and sentencing would impact him and his family. Include specific examples from the text that illustrate T.J. Avery's true character.
- Mention some things the prosecution might say about T.J. Avery's actions, and explain why those things are untrue.
- Ask for a specific outcome from the court, whether it is finding T.J. not guilty of murder, charging him with a different crime for breaking into the mercantile, or giving him a lesser punishment.
- Be sure to thank the court for their time and consideration.

Remember to maintain a formal style and tone throughout your letter. A formal tone helps to establish you as a trustworthy authority on the subject of T.J. Avery's innocence.