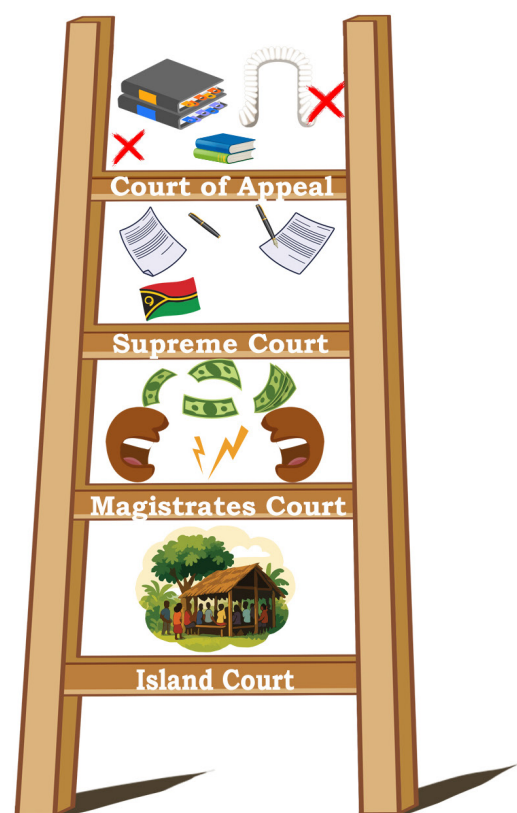


Level 6



Courts: The Ladder of Justice

By Daryl Abel and Cathy Hite Sakumalefo
Illustrated by Anum Khan



Courts: The Ladder of Justice



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Ava is a curious 9-year-old girl who loves asking questions. One afternoon, after school, she hears her uncle talking about a land dispute being settled in the Island Court.

“What’s the Island Court? How does it work?”
Ava asks, her big brown eyes shining with curiosity.





“Go ask Grandma,” her uncle replies with a smile. “She knows all about the courts in Vanuatu!”



Ava races to Grandma's house, eager to learn.

Grandma is sitting under a tall mango tree, weaving mats from pandanus leaves. Ava plops down beside her.

“Grandma, can you tell me about the courts in Vanuatu? I want to know how they work!”

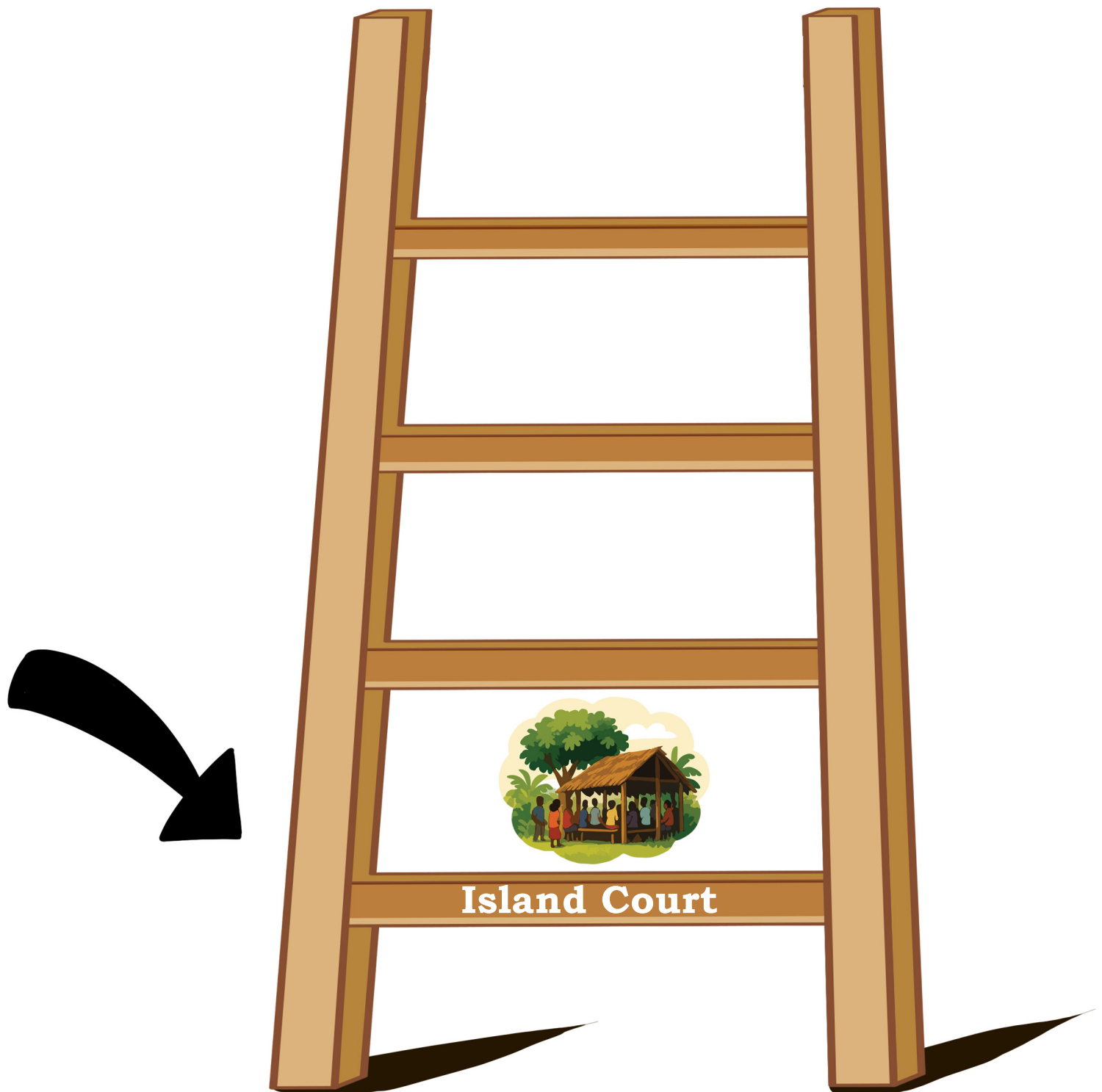
An elderly woman with short, curly white hair and a warm smile is sitting on the ground. She is wearing a blue short-sleeved shirt with large white and orange flowers. She is focused on weaving a large, green, woven basket. Behind her is a large, thick tree trunk. The tree's branches are filled with green leaves and several bright orange fruits. The background shows a clear blue sky and some green bushes. The overall style is a vibrant, cartoonish illustration.

Grandma chuckles. “Ah, the courts are like a ladder, starting from the bottom and climbing to the top. Let me explain.”

“At the bottom of the ladder is the **Island Court**,” Grandma begins. “This court handles local minor civil and criminal matters. It also follows traditional customary law, as long as they don’t go against fairness or written laws.”



“Who uses the Island Court?” Ava asks.



“Mostly people in villages,” Grandma replies.
“It helps solve problems close to home, within
the boundaries of their community.”



Ava imagines villagers gathering to resolve their issues in the community Nakamal.





“Next up,” Grandma says, “is the **Magistrates Court**. It handles cases that are a bit bigger. For example, it deals with disagreements over money, where the amount is under one million Vatu and tenant disagreements that are under two million Vatu. It also handles small criminal cases where the punishment is no more than two years in prison.”





“What else?” Ava asks, scribbling in her notebook.

“It can hear appeals from Island Courts for civil matters,” Grandma said. “When people who’ve been to the Island Court aren’t satisfied with the outcome, they can file an appeal to the Magistrates Court.”

A colorful illustration of an elderly woman with short, curly white hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a blue short-sleeved shirt with a pattern of white and orange flowers. She is sitting on the ground, leaning against the thick brown trunk of a large tree. The tree has lush green leaves and several bright orange fruits hanging from its branches. The background shows a clear blue sky and some green bushes. The overall style is bright and cheerful.

“That’s interesting!” Ava says.

Grandma smiles and moves to the next step on the ladder.



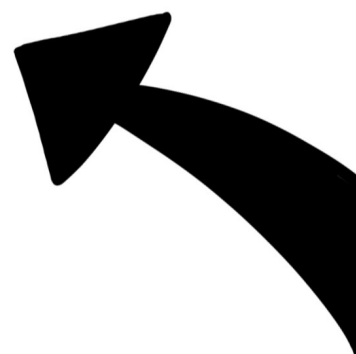
Supreme Court



Magistrates Court



Island Court



“Above the Magistrates Court is the **Supreme Court**. It’s powerful because it can hear any case and has an unlimited jurisdiction. It also handles special matters like election disputes and complaints about emergency regulations made by the Council of Ministers.”



“Does it hear appeals too?” Ava asks.

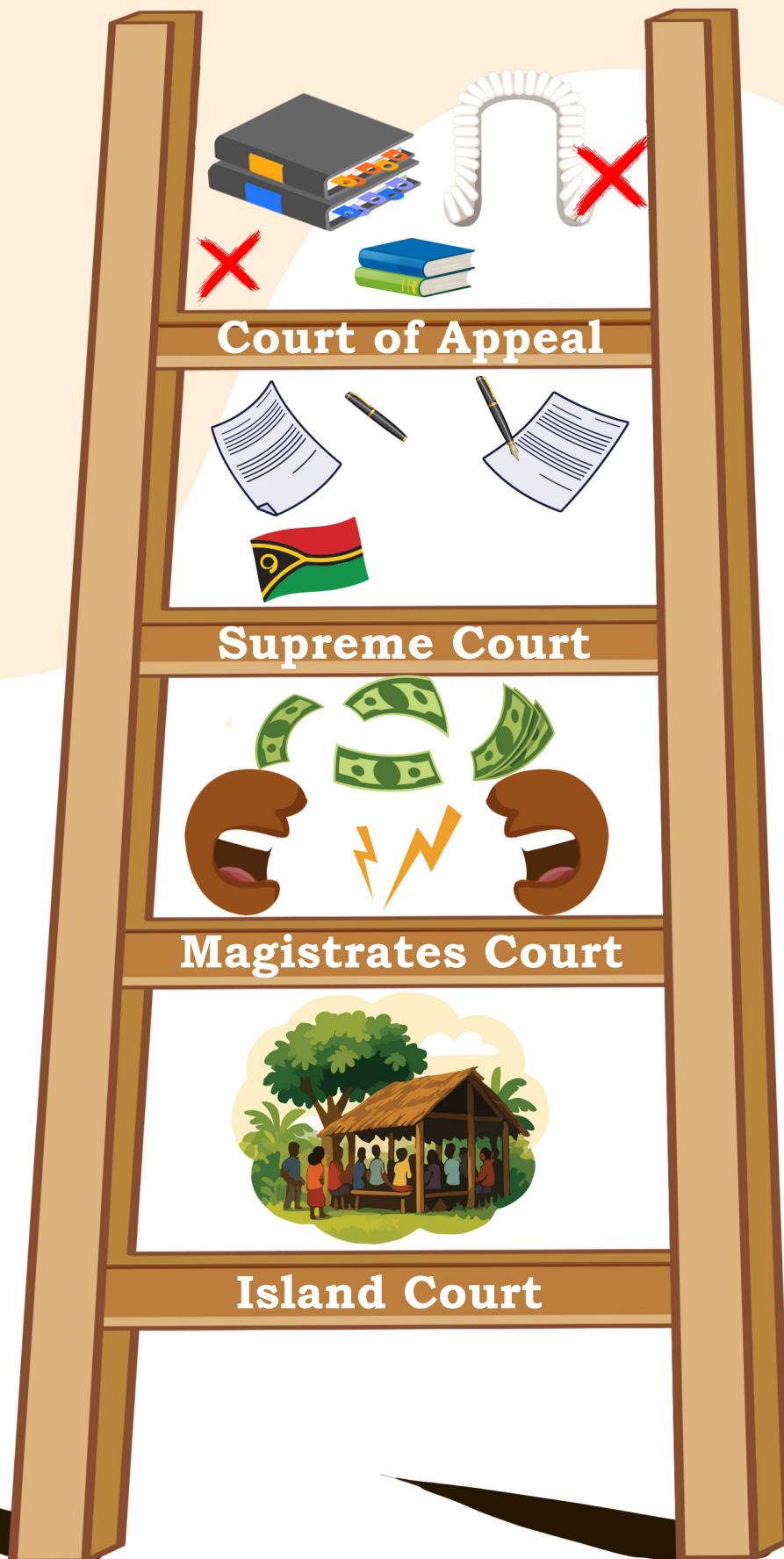
“Yes,” Grandma says. “It hears appeals from the Magistrates Court and Island Court, mostly on customary land matters.”

“Wow,” Ava whispers. “The Supreme Court sounds very important!”



Grandma chuckles. “But there’s one more step at the top of the ladder. That’s the **Court of Appeal**. It’s like the highest chief in the land. If someone thinks the Supreme Court made a mistake, they can ask the Court of Appeal to review the decision.”





“What can it do?” Ava asks.

“It can change the decision or agree with it,” Grandma explains. “But it won’t interfere unless the Supreme Court’s decision is professionally questioned.”

“So, it’s like a wise chief who settles big arguments?” Ava suggests.

Grandma nods. “Exactly!”





Ava leans back, thinking. “So, the courts in Vanuatu are like a ladder. The Island Court is at the bottom, helping villages. Then comes the Magistrates Court for bigger issues. After that, the Supreme Court handles everything else. And at the very top is the Court of Appeal.”



Grandma beams with pride. “You’ve got it, my clever girl!”



That evening, Ava writes in her journal:
“Today, Grandma taught me about the courts in Vanuatu. They are like a ladder, helping people step by step to find justice. One day, I hope to climb that ladder and help others understand and defend their rights.”

As Ava closes her journal, she dreams of becoming a judge who brings fairness to her island and beyond.



Glossary

- Court: A place where lawyers and judges help people solve problems or disputes according to the law.
- Island Court: The first level of courts in Vanuatu that helps people in villages with small problems, like land disputes or neighbour disagreements.
- Magistrates Court: The second level of courts that deals with bigger issues, such as money disputes and small criminal cases.
- Supreme Court: The highest court in Vanuatu that can hear any case and make important decisions about laws and disputes.
- Court of Appeal: The top court that reviews decisions made by the Supreme Court if someone proves there was a mistake.

- Justice: The concept of legal retribution for an illegal act, as well as being fair and ensuring everyone is treated equally under the law.
- Customary Law: Traditional rules that come from the culture and customs of Vanuatu, helping to solve problems in communities.
- Dispute: A disagreement or argument between people that needs to be resolved.
- Jurisdiction: The area or type of cases that a court is allowed to handle.
- Appeal: When someone asks a higher court to review a decision made by a lower court because they believe it was wrong.

**You can use these questions
to talk about this book with
your family, friends and
teachers.**



What is the third highest court on the ladder?



Why does the Court of Appeal have to monitor the Supreme Court?

What kind of people work in these courts?



Do you know anyone who's been to any of these courts?



Try making your own ladder of the justice system! You can make it on the ground and use sticks, leaves, or anything else, or in a classroom with friends.

About the author

Daryl Abel is from Tanna Island in Vanuatu, while Cathy Hite Sakumalefo is from Malaita in the Solomon Islands. Both Daryl and Cathy share a passion for empowering young minds through storytelling, inspiring them to write stories to educate and uplift the children of today, tomorrow's leaders of Vanuatu. One of the things they enjoy most in their friendship is discussing the challenges facing their countries, and asking themselves: "What can we do?" or "How can we help?" This collaborative spirit not only fuels their creativity but also reflects their commitment to fostering a positive impact on their communities through literature.



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Save the Children



Original illustrations by Anum Khan

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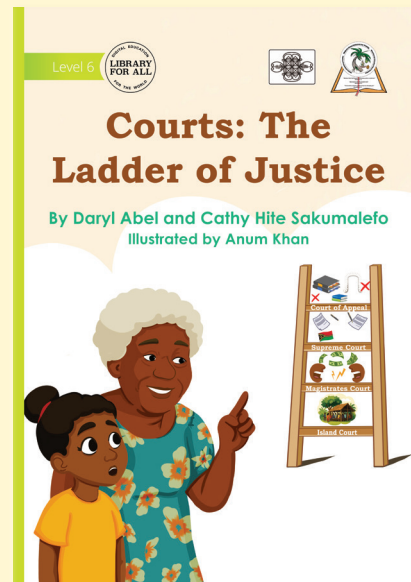
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Courts: The Ladder of Justice

Ava wants to learn about the courts of law in Vanuatu and asks her grandma. Grandma tells her about the Ladder of Justice and Ava decides she's going to climb it to help her people!



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