HISTORIC COURT TRIALS

Dr Jan Sigvartsen PhD
tarragindi.org



Berrien Springs Partnership Syllabus

CLASS TITLE:	Historic Court Trials (ages 10-20)
TOTAL REQUIRED HRS:	16
ADDITIONAL TIME POSSIBLE:	Yes (if needed)
TOTAL SEMESTER HOURS:	16
LOCATION (address):	Old Courthouse Square, 313 N Cass Street, Berrien Springs, MI 49103
PRIMARY INSTRUCTOR:	Dr Jan A. Sigvartsen PhD **(goes by Dr Jan)**
SECONDARY INSTRUCTOR:	Ms Leanne M. Sigvartsen **(goes by Ms Leanne)**
CONTACT INFORMATION:	269-363-3968 (text available) Jan@tarragindi.org Leanne@tarragindi.org tarragindi.org
INSTRUCTOR QUALIFICATIONS:	Dr Jan - BA, MA, PhD Ms Leanne – BA Psych, PGD Psych, MCouns

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To allow students to learn to learn about the history of the Berrien Springs Courthouse – Michigan's oldest courthouse. This class takes place in this historic courthouse.
2. To have students hone their acting skills and reenact real court trails that were tried in the Berrien Springs Courthouse. We want students to experience and walk a mile in the shoes of people who lived in our town and discover what justice was like in the 1800s.
3. To encourage students to think critically, discuss complex issues that these court trails raise, like attitudes towards the poor, privilege, violence, a justified crime, false accusations due to prejudice, and what does it really mean to be free?

All our classes are half semester (8 week) programs due to weather constraints.

Dr Jan can't do an archaeology in the snow or frozen ground! But he can teach Historic Court Trails! All his 12 programs do two classes in January and then half of them continue until March. The other half take a break and continue in April when the ground is thawed and we can be outside. This class is in the first half of the semester. **A list of his classes and when they are taught is on the next page.**

If you are eligible, you can register for two of his programs in the Spring 2027 semester – one in the first half of the semester, and one in the second half and not overload your schedule each week!

CLASS TIMES:
This 2-hour Historic Court Trails class is held every Wednesday FOR 8 WEEKS ONLY, from January 13 – February 24. You can make up missed classes by attending one of our other classes if needed.

- Wednesday 1:00pm – 3:00pm

Our Spring 2027 Classes

First Half of the Semester

- **Arrowhead Making and Ancient Tools** - learn to make stone arrowheads, identify and date them, and make ancient stone and wood tools used by ancient people. Syllabus at tarragindi.org
- **Board Gaming, Civilization Building** – learn to build strong communities by building small ones in an in-person, interactive, screen-free class. Syllabus at tarragindi.org
- **Genealogy 101** – trace your family tree as far back as you can go (Warning: HIGHLY addictive!!). Syllabus at tarragindi.org
- **Historic Photography** – learn photography by capturing a new local historic site each week and learning its story. Syllabus at tarragindi.org
- **Historic Court Trials** – bring your acting skills and relive real 1800s court trials that were tried in the Berrien Springs Courthouse – Michigan's oldest courthouse. Syllabus at tarragindi.org
- **Historic Storytelling** – learn the ancient art of telling stories and keeping our history alive. Syllabus at tarragindi.org

Second Half of the Semester

- **Archaeology Dig – Tarragindi** - Excavate one of the Berrien County's oldest settler farms, that is nearly 200 years old, with archaeologist Dr Jan Sigvartsen PhD. We find antique bottles, coins, and so much more! Syllabus at tarragindi.org
- **Cemetery Restoration Project** - Help save one of Berrien County's oldest cemeteries and learn the life stories of our earliest European settlers who are buried there. Syllabus at tarragindi.org
- **Garden Recreation Project - 1000 Years Ago** - Recreate a real Woodland Native American garden based on Michigan's very own archaeology record. Syllabus at tarragindi.org
- **Gardening Project, 1830s Early Settlers Garden** - Recreate a real Berrien County early settler garden based on historical records. Syllabus at tarragindi.org
- **Historic Tree Rescue - 250-Year-Old Oak** - Participate in the rescue of what we believe may be Berrien County's last "Witness Tree." Syllabus at tarragindi.org
- **Historic Writing** – hone your writing skills by capturing local historical stories and getting them published. Syllabus at tarragindi.org

SYLLABUS/OUTLINE: Weekly approximate breakdown of activities:

Class 1: (2 hours) January 13
Tarragindi Archaeology Dig site: 6161 Pheasant Court, Berrien Springs, MI 49103.
This class is the foundation of your program. This is where we go over our documentation, sign waivers and photo/video permissions and talk about the class and expectations.

Class 2: (2 hours) January 16, 2:30-4:30pm OR January 17, 2:30-4:30pm (attend 1 only)
1860 County Poor Farm Tour (Love Creek County Park, 9292 Huckleberry Rd, Berrien Center)

Did you know most early settlers in Berrien County couldn't tame the land into a workable farm? Many didn't even have the money to go home. That is why Berrien County set up the County Poor Farm that became a thriving community of its own and an example of what can be achieved when communities work together.

Class 3: (2 hours) January 20
Historic Court Trials – Old Courthouse Square, 313 N Cass Street, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

A tour of the Courthouse, including the "accused jailhouse walk" from the jail to this imposing Greek Revival building. Relive the first trail we have a record for in Berrien County - the 1835 trial of a dog getting into the neighbor's sheep paddock which tried before the Courthouse was built. Also, hear about the first trails in the Berrien Springs Courthouse that were tried by the hugely popular Judge Epaphroditus Ransom – who in 1840 threatened to take the United States Government's Department of War to court! Not surprisingly he became Michigan's 7th Governor.

Class 4: (2 hours) January 27
Historic Court Trials – Old Courthouse Square, 313 N Cass Street, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

The Thomas Lily murder trial was one of the biggest trials ever tried in Berrien Springs – was it murder or self-defense?

Class 5: (2 hours) February 3
Historic Court Trials – Old Courthouse Square, 313 N Cass Street, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

We continue with the Thomas Lily murder trial - one of the biggest trials ever tried in the Berrien Springs Courthouse – was it murder or self-defense?

Class 6: (2 hours) February 10
Historic Court Trials – Old Courthouse Square, 313 N Cass Street, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

We continue with the Thomas Lily murder trial - one of the biggest trials ever tried in the Berrien Springs Courthouse? What other crimes was Thomas Lily accused of too?

Class 7: (2 hours) February 17
Historic Court Trials – Old Courthouse Square, 313 N Cass Street, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

The Old Bailey trials were how many people were forcibly transported from England to the United States as convicts prior to United States independence. After Independence, they were sent to Australia. Reenact the trails of transported convicts, to both the United States, and one of Australia's most infamous transported convicts - who was a woman.

Class 8: (2 hours) February 24
Historic Court Trials – Old Courthouse Square, 313 N Cass Street, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

The trial of two counterfeiters who escaped from the 1838 Berrien Springs jail a month before the Sheriff was up for reelection. Was this a justified crime? What sentence did Judge Ransom give them? And how did they end up in California and start the California Gold Rush?

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

1) Students agree to attend at least 80% of class sessions/lessons offered. We have plenty of classes scheduled so you can easily catch-up missed classes. Attendance is kept online and tracked by Partnership staff. Unexcused absences, or failure to meet the 80% threshold may result in program discontinuation. See Ms Leanne if there is a problem or you need to attend a different class time.

2) The Partnership Student Assessment is filled out by the teacher and turned in to Partnership staff. The rubric is found on the teacher's online attendance sheet. Failing marks for lack of participation, behavior issues, excessive absences, etc. may result in program discontinuation.

3) Other class-specific assessment: Engagement in the program, follow through with instruction,

care taken with handling artifacts, and participation in research of artifacts found.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

www.tarragindi.org/resources - page on our website giving links to local history resources, and Parent Partnership project resources.

CLASS-SPECIFIC POLICIES:

ZERO BULLYING – we have a zero bullying policy. We want to be a space were people build one another up, not tear each other down. Please report bullying to Ms Leanne immediately. Do not attempt to deal with it yourself or have your parent deal with it.

We work on a compassionate three-warning system. A child engaging in anti-social behaviors will be given a first and a second warning, along with compassionate and clear expectations of future behavior and examples of that behavior. We have only ever needed to give one first warning, due to the efficacy of this compassionate system. However, if a child requires a third warning, they will be removed from all Tarragindi Initiative programming.

ZERO Sexual harassment, profanity, sexually explicit, or crude behavior or speech – we have a strict zero-acceptance policy for anti-social behaviors. Again, we are a space that makes people feel welcome and accepted, not uncomfortable. Please report these behaviors to Ms Leanne immediately. She will deal with it and these behaviors were the topic of her Masters research thesis. Again, grace will be offered along with the same compassionate three warning protocol outlined above.

Withdrawal from the class: If you wish to withdraw from the class, you must do so *following Class 1 (January 13) or prior to Class 2 (January 16-17)*. Otherwise, very significant investment will be made in you/your child and their participation in the class that you may be financially responsible for if you withdraw after this. *Your class starts on January 13 – not when we start our first court trail on January 27.* You must attend the first two January classes as they are the foundation of the program – let us know if this is a problem as we may be able to schedule a catch-up class for you. Parent Partnership staff have been advised of our deadlines. If your schedule changes after the Tarragindi withdrawal deadline, please talk to Ms Leanne, as she may be able to work something out for you or schedule another class time for you.

Attendance: If you can't attend the first two classes in January, please let Ms Leanne know so she can arrange a make-up class for you as they are the foundation of the program. Students can attend any of the two scheduled classes each week. They are also welcome to make up a class by attending another class time too.

Weather: It is rare that we cancel class due to rain or snow. If there is a Snow Day in Berrien Springs School District, the class will be canceled as the County Park (the Courthouse) will be closed. If a Snow Day is declared, we will send all students an emailed. Check your email before coming to class. No email – class is on. Dr Jan will still go down to the Courthouse to ensure everyone got our email message. Double check your spam folder.