

▣ ABOUT THE MOVIE ▣

| | |
|------------------|---|
| TITLE | A Civil Action |
| DIRECTOR | Steven Zaillian |
| YEAR AND COUNTRY | 1999 USA |
| GENRE | Legal Thriller |
| ACTORS | John Travolta (Jan Schlichtmann), William H. Macy (James Gordon), Robert Duvall (Jerome Facher) |

PLOT

John Travolta plays Jan Schlichtmann, a successful personal injury lawyer, slick and cynical, who only accepts cases where megabuck damages can be awarded and the defendants are willing to settle rather than actually face trial. Against his better judgement he is persuaded to take on the case of a group of townfolk worried about the effects on their children's health of toxic waste from local factories. His firm sponsors the cost of the civil action against the huge conglomerates who ultimately own the factories and are represented by Jerry Facher (R. Duvall), a wily law professor, who outfoxes Schlichtmann in the cut and thrust of the trial battle. Instead of getting out while he still can, Schlichtmann decides to accept no compromise settlement and puts his career and all his worldly goods at risk.

LANGUAGE

Contemporary US English. Legal terminology (see glossary) used.

VOCABULARY

| | |
|---|--|
| "I'm not a rat" : "I won't be disloyal" | lawsuit: formal allegation of illegal behaviour |
| bullies: people who oppress the weak | lawsuits: legal case against someone |
| comes to their senses: sees reason at last | let it get away: allow it to escape |
| CPR: cardiopulmonary resuscitation | lousy evidence: weak proof |
| cut our losses: stop spending anymore money | miscarriage (of justice): incorrect application of the law |
| deposing: making a witness statement | motion (legal): submission of a proposition to the court (usually to dismiss a case) |
| desecrated: holiness violated | neighbourhood: local area |
| disgruntled employees: unhappy ones | orphan: a case no law firm wants |
| dumped: discarded (illegally) | paint thinners: solvents |
| file a complaint: register formal accusation with the court | patronise: offensively condescend |
| fillings: (metal) tooth implants | plaintiff: the accuser |
| financial burden: excessive debt/spending commitments | pulled over: stopped at the roadside |
| foreman: spokesman for the jury | punitive damages: compensation in excess of loss as a punishment |
| front loader: bulldozer | settlement: an agreement between the parties without a (completed) trial |
| get rid of: dispose of | squeal point: moment when we have had enough |
| go for broke: bet everything on winning | steeped in history and in wealth: saturated with tradition and money |
| gully: a channel worn by running water | struck down in his prime: seriously damaged when in the best of health |
| hallowed round: holy place | tannery: leather factory |
| impropriety: improper (unprofess.) behaviour | the stand: witness box |
| in remission: recovering | to render it moot: to make it questionable |
| IRS - Internal Revenue Service: US tax authorities | wilful negligence: voluntary lack of due care |