

Lesson Guide

A Conversation with Chief Justice John G. Roberts on the Origin, Nature, and Importance of the Supreme Court

This lesson explains the structure and function of the judicial branch. Students will learn how the Supreme Court originated, how cases are selected and why it is an important institution. In the video "A Conversation on the Constitution: The Origin, Nature and Importance of the Supreme Court," Chief Justice John G. Roberts answers students' questions about the Court and his role as chief justice.

Before showing the video:

Review the origin and role of the Supreme Court. It would also be helpful to familiarize students with related terms.

Discussion Questions:

Before showing the video, you can prepare students for the topics and cases by asking the following series of questions:

- Why did the founders establish the Supreme Court?
- Who is John Marshall?
- What principles did he establish?

Agree or Disagree:

- The Supreme Court is reactionary.
- The Chief Justice's vote carries more weight than those from the other Justices.
- The Constitution specifies the number of Justices allowed to serve on the Court.

Video:

The video presents a conversation between Chief Justice John G. Roberts and students about the origin, nature and importance of the Supreme Court.

Review Questions:

1. Why does the Constitution describe the executive and legislative branches in more detail than the judicial branch?
2. How are cases brought before the Supreme Court? What process must they first go through before getting to the Court?
3. What is the role of the Chief Justice? In what ways are the duties of the Chief Justice similar to those of the other Justices? What special powers does the Chief Justice possess?
4. What are the purposes of recording the decisions and dissents for each case?
5. How unique was Gideon's case? What principle enabled him to appeal to the Court?

Extension Activity:

1. Ask students to brainstorm ways that the Supreme Court affects their lives.
2. Discuss recent decisions on issues relevant to young adults. Below are links to helpful PDF articles.
 - a. *Morse v. Frederick* (2007) on free speech
 - i. FindLaw, “The Supreme Court’s “Bong Hits 4 Jesus” First Amendment Decision”
<http://writ.lp.findlaw.com/hilden/20070709.html>
 - ii. PBS, “Supreme Court Rules Against “Bong Hits 4 Jesus” Case”
http://www.pbs.org/teachers/learning.now/2007/06/supreme_court_rules_against_st.html
 - iii. NYT, “Vote Against Banner Shows Divide on Speech in Schools”
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/26/washington/26speech.html>
 - b. *MGM Studios v. Grokster* (2005) on file sharing
 - i. FindLaw, “The Supreme Court Finally Steps Into the Fray”
<http://writ.news.findlaw.com/hilden/20050215.html>
 - ii. FindLaw, “Apple Rips While Grokster Burns”
http://writ.news.findlaw.com/commentary/20050629_sunder.html
 - iii. FindLaw “Intellectual Property in the Online World”
<http://library.findlaw.com/2005/Jun/1/174711.html>
 - c. Seattle and Louisville cases (2007) on race and school assignment
 - i. FindLaw, “The Supreme Court Decides Whether Race-Based Pupil-Assignment Systems are Constitutional”
<http://writ.lp.findlaw.com/lazarus/20061207.html>
 - ii. NYT, July 5, 2007, “Justice Denied”
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/05/opinion/05thu1.html>

Additional Resources:

1. *The Pursuit of Justice*: Introduction: The Supreme Court as a Mirror
http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/files/documents/books/the%20pursuit%20of%20justice/5_11_intro.pdf
2. *The Pursuit of Justice*: Chapter 13: Public School Desegregation
http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/files/documents/books/the%20pursuit%20of%20justice/108_119_ch_13.pdf