

Supreme Court of the United States

How It Works

The existence of the Supreme Court is guaranteed in the Constitution of the United States. It is the highest court in the land and hears cases that have been appealed at lower federal courts. It also hears cases appealed from state courts if the issue being appealed is a federal one. It is the trial court for special cases such as actions that the United States or one of its ambassadors is named in as a party.

Landmark Decisions

From zoning questions and personal lawsuits to ruling on the definition of marriage, judges at all levels of the judiciary make decisions every day that have the potential to affect every one of us. Below is a list of just a few of the landmark decisions the Supreme Court has made. Write one or two sentences for each decision explaining what made it significant.

- ♦ Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857)
- ♦ Brown v. Board of Education (1954)
- ♦ Mapp v. Ohio (1961)
- ♦ Engel v. Vitale (1962)
- ♦ Gideon v. Wainwright (1963)
- ♦ New York Times Co. v. Sullivan (1964)
- ♦ Miranda v. Arizona (1966)
- ♦ Roe v. Wade (1973)
- ♦ Texas v. Johnson (1989)
- ♦ Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe (2000)
- ♦ Zelma v. Simmons-Harris (2002)
- ♦ Grutter v. Bollinger (2003)
- ♦ Obergefell v. Hodges (2015)

Choose three of these decisions and write a paper examining what brought them about and what the effects of the decisions have been.

Under whose presidency were each of our current justices appointed? In considering a ruling such as Obergefell v. Hodges, what Presidents ultimately had influence over the men and women who made this ruling?

Landmark Quotations

Choose a quote or a passage from a key Supreme Court ruling. It may be one of the ones you studied and chose to write about or from another ruling that you are aware of. Copy it below.

[illegible]

How Many Years

It's time to add to your list of the current Supreme Court justices. Record how many Presidents each justice has served under. Note how many years each justice has served. Determine who has served the longest amount of time and who has served the shortest amount.

Create a chart of the last twenty-five Supreme Court justices and the length of time each served as an active justice. What is the average number of years each justice served?

A Look Back

Choose a historic Supreme Court justice, who is no longer actively serving, and write a short paper about his or her career and rulings.

Extension Activities

Art:

What does the concept of "justice" mean to you? How does the Bible describe or define justice? Create a picture, drawing, sculpture, or presentation that represents the concept of justice.

Look into art history and discover how artists have chosen to represent the concept of justice throughout the ages.

Health:

Do Supreme Court justices get sick days? What happens if one of the justices is scheduled for an argument day and has a health crisis?



Why Every Vote Counts

You've done an incredible amount of work and research to get to the end of this unit study. Well done! You've traced our elections and the impact they have from the local to the federal level and you've looked at how elected officials impact and affect the decisions made by other non-elected agencies and departments.

Write an essay about why every vote counts, or if you have a dissenting opinion, explain your point of view and the reasoning you have used to reach this decision. Next, condense your thoughts and logic into a single paragraph. Finally, condense what you've learned into a single statement. You may find that writing fewer words is actually harder than writing an entire essay but is a great tool to help you analyze precisely what you believe.

With a parent's permission, share your essay or other presentation regarding what you learned with your co-op or homeschool group.

