

The Judicial Branch | Lesson Plan



Students will gain a comprehensive understanding of the structure, functions, and powers of the Judicial Branch of the U.S. government, including the roles of different federal courts, the process of judicial review, and the significance of the Supreme Court's decisions in shaping American law.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify and list the components of the federal court system, including district courts, circuit courts, and the Supreme Court.
- Explain the concept of judicial review and describe its role in the federal judiciary system.
- Compare the terms of service for Supreme Court justices to those of other federal positions, highlighting the unique aspect of lifetime appointments.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Judicial Branch:** One of the three branches of the U.S. government established by the Constitution, responsible for interpreting the law and ensuring it aligns with the Constitution.
- **Judicial Review:** The power of the courts to assess whether a law or government action is constitutional.
- **Supreme Court:** The highest court in the United States, which has the ultimate appellate jurisdiction over all federal and state court cases that involve a point of constitutional and federal law.
- **Chief Justice:** The head of the Supreme Court, overseeing the operations of the court and presiding over its sessions.
- **Lifetime Appointment:** The term of office for Supreme Court justices and some other federal judges, which lasts as long as they choose to serve unless they are impeached.

Educational Standards: CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.L.5, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.R.4, CCRA.R.6, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4

Academic Subject Areas: Political Science, Civics, Judicial Branch

What You'll Need

- Video: *Street Smarts: The Judicial Branch* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *The Judicial Branch* (Click [Here](#))

Lesson Plan (45 minutes)

Warm Up: (15 minutes)



Scan to watch episode:

1. Start by encouraging students to think about the rules in football and how these rules ensure fair play and order during games. Ask, "Why do we need rules in sports like football?"
2. Guide students to compare specific football rules, such as pass interference or holding penalties, with legal principles, such as procedural laws, that govern how legal proceedings are conducted.
3. Discuss the structure of the federal court system by likening it to different levels of football competitions—from high school football games (district courts) and college football playoffs (circuit courts) to the NFL Super Bowl (Supreme Court).
 - Pose a question, "What might happen if there were no referees in an NFL game?" Use this to illustrate the chaos that could ensue without a judicial system to interpret and enforce laws.
4. Explain judicial review by drawing parallels to a referee using instant replay during a football game to review a call on the field. Ask, "Why is it important for a referee to use the rulebook during a review?"
 - Discuss how this function of the referees is similar to the role of the Judicial Branch in checking the fairness of laws against the Constitution, ensuring each law "plays by the rules."
5. Introduce the process of appointing Supreme Court justices with an analogy: "Imagine if the NFL coach (the President) could pick referees for the Super Bowl but needed the approval from the team owners (the Senate)."
 - Discuss why these referees (justices) must be appointed for life—emphasizing that this helps them remain impartial and unaffected by public or political pressures, much like a referee needs to be unbiased in a game.
6. Describe the Chief Justice as the head referee in the Super Bowl. Explain that this role not only involves making calls but also organizing how the court (or game) is managed.
 - Invite students to consider how leadership within a referee team might influence the outcome of a game, paralleling how the Chief Justice influences court proceedings and judicial outcomes.
7. The Judicial Branch's role as the guardians of the Constitution is to ensure the government "plays by the rules," just like referees ensure a football game is fair.
8. Hand out copies of the "Street Smarts: The Judicial Branch Worksheet" to the students and explain that they will have the opportunity to play along with kids in the game-show-style video next.

Watch and Complete: (20 minutes)

1. Play the *Street Smarts: The Judicial Branch* video. Pause as needed to help students understand the concepts. Use these guiding questions to help students:
 - What is the primary function of the Judicial Branch?
 - Why is judicial review important in the context of the U.S. government?
 - How does the appointment process of Supreme Court justices affect their role in government?

- What are the implications of lifetime appointments for Supreme Court justices?
- How does the role of the Chief Justice differ from other justices in the Supreme Court?
- What would happen if there were no Judicial Branch or if it were significantly weaker?
- Why does the Supreme Court have “original jurisdiction” in cases involving states or foreign ambassadors?

Wrap-Up: (10 minutes)

1. After the video, ask students to write down or share verbally how they think the Judicial Branch affects their daily lives or might affect them in the future. Alternatively, you can ask them to think about how different their lives might be without the protections offered by juridical oversight.
2. Pose a question like, “Can you think of any recent news stories where the Judicial Branch played a crucial role? How does that affect your view of its importance?”
3. Allow students to ask any questions they have about the Judicial Branch, the lesson content, or related topics. Address any misconceptions or unclear areas that students might express.
4. Encourage students to keep learning about the Judicial Branch by following current events that involve judicial decisions or by reading about landmark cases.
5. Collect completed worksheets as an assessment or participation grade.
6. End by summarizing the importance of the Judicial Branch. The rules and decisions they review affect everything from the laws our government passes to the rights we enjoy every day. By understanding how our government functions, students are not just learning about how decisions are made—they are preparing to be informed and active participants in our republic.

Don't have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (15 minutes)

Distribute the worksheet and allow students to complete it while they follow along with the video.