



Leo & Layla Meet Justice John Marshall | Lesson Plan

What is the judicial branch's role in the United States government?

Students will learn about the origins of the judicial branch of the United States. They will time travel with Leo and Layla to meet Chief Justice John Marshall and learn how he made the Supreme Court what it is today.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify how government is organized at the national level (e.g., three branches of government).
- Identify legislative, executive, and judicial branch functions of the U.S.
- Explain the role of the court system in interpreting law and settling conflicts.
- Explain why the United States has a Supreme Court.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Judicial Branch:** The Judicial Branch is one of the three branches of the United States government (made up of the Supreme Court, the highest court in the land). It is a governing body responsible for interpreting and determining the constitutionality of the law and settling legal disputes in a neutral way.
- **Chief Justice:** A chief justice is the highest-ranking judge who presides over the United States Supreme Court.
- **Unconstitutional:** Something that goes against what is stated in the Constitution.

Educational Standards: History, Civics, and Government

What You'll Need

- Video: [Leo & Layla Meet Justice John Marshall](#)



Scan to watch video.

- Worksheet (included in this lesson plan): *Leo & Layla Meet Justice John Marshall*

Lesson Plan (45 minutes)

Warm-Up: (10 minutes)

1. (Connect to Prior Knowledge) Present the students with the following scenario:
Let's imagine that during lunchtime, our class is playing a game of baseball. The score is tied, and one student is rounding the bases. Her foot touches home plate just as the bell rings for everyone to line up. The runner thinks she is safe. The catcher thinks she is out. How can this dispute be resolved?
2. Students will share their answers in a brief discussion. If needed, guide the students to the solution of having a neutral umpire/referee make a decision.
3. Ask: *Now, that's how something could be settled during a sports game at school, but how are disputes resolved out in the real world? If two citizens need someone neutral to settle a disagreement, where can they go/who can they turn to?*
Students: *You can go to court! Go see a judge!*
4. Say: *Today we are going to learn about the judicial branch of the United States government, and more specifically, about Chief Justice John Marshall, who made the Supreme Court what it is today*
5. Display a copy of *Leo & Layla Meet Justice John Marshall* Worksheet on a screen in the classroom.
6. Call on a couple of students to read each question aloud/preview the questions before they watch the video.

Watch and Complete: (25 minutes)

1. Watch the video.
2. Once the class has previewed the questions, pause periodically so students can complete the worksheet/answer the questions.
 - a. (Gradual Release of Responsibility [*I Do, We Do, Two Do, You Do*]) Model how to answer the first question in complete sentences. Students can copy down your response. As a class, answer the next question. Have students turn and talk to a deskmate to answer question 3. Then the students answer the remaining questions independently.

Wrap-Up: (10 minutes)

1. Give students some extra time (if needed) to complete the worksheet independently.
2. Collect as formative assessment or discuss in class.
3. Closing Questions: *What is the judicial branch's role in the United States government? How did Justice John Marshall help shape the Supreme Court?*

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.

Worksheet

Name _____ Date _____

Leo & Layla Meet Justice John Marshall



Directions: Read the following passage and answer the questions below in complete sentences as you watch the video.

Justice John Marshall

John Marshall was born on September 24, 1755, in the colony of Virginia. He was the oldest of 15 children. From an early age, Marshall developed a love of history and literature. He set his sights on becoming a lawyer but put his plans on hold when he joined the Continental Army in 1775 to fight alongside George Washington during the Revolutionary War. After the war, he focused on his law practice, served in Virginia's Congress, was elected to the United States Congress, and was appointed by President John Adams to be his Secretary of State. When John Adams lost his presidential reelection in 1800 to Thomas Jefferson (Marshall's second cousin), Adams nominated Marshall to be chief justice of the Supreme Court before he left office. Marshall was the fourth justice to ever hold that position.

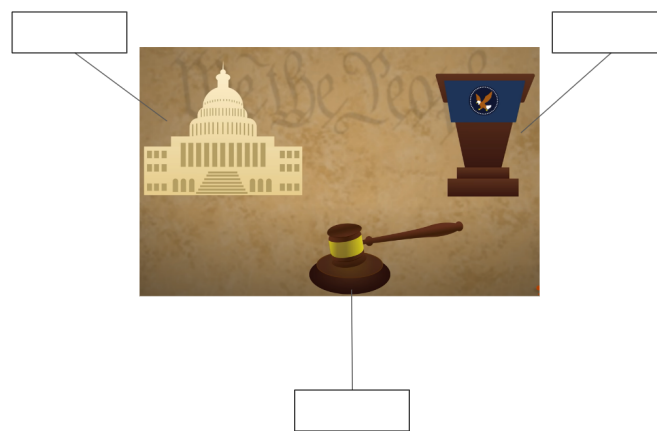
At the time, the Judicial Branch wasn't as powerful a branch of government in comparison to the Executive Branch, led by the president, and the Legislative Branch, made up of Congress (the House of Representatives and the Senate). But over Justice Marshall's 34 years as chief justice, he transformed the Judicial Branch into a governing body equal to the other two branches, that would settle disputes in a neutral way.

John Marshall is known for his many contributions to the country. He supported and played a major role in the ratification of the U.S. Constitution and made it the supreme law of the land. He set forth to make the Supreme Court the ultimate interpreter of the Constitution, the law to which the other branches had to be held accountable. Under Justice Marshall's leadership, the Supreme Court ruled on over 1,000 decisions, many of which Marshall wrote himself. Almost all of the rulings were unanimous, where all seven justices on the Court were in agreement, demonstrating Marshall's remarkable leadership skills in a time when getting everyone to agree

was particularly challenging, due to the fact that the justices appointed to the Court were nominated by presidents who had very different political views than Marshall.

Marshall served as chief justice through six presidential administrations and served on the Supreme Court until his death on July 6, 1835, at the age of 79.

1. What is a chief justice?
2. Label the three branches of government. Who makes up each branch?



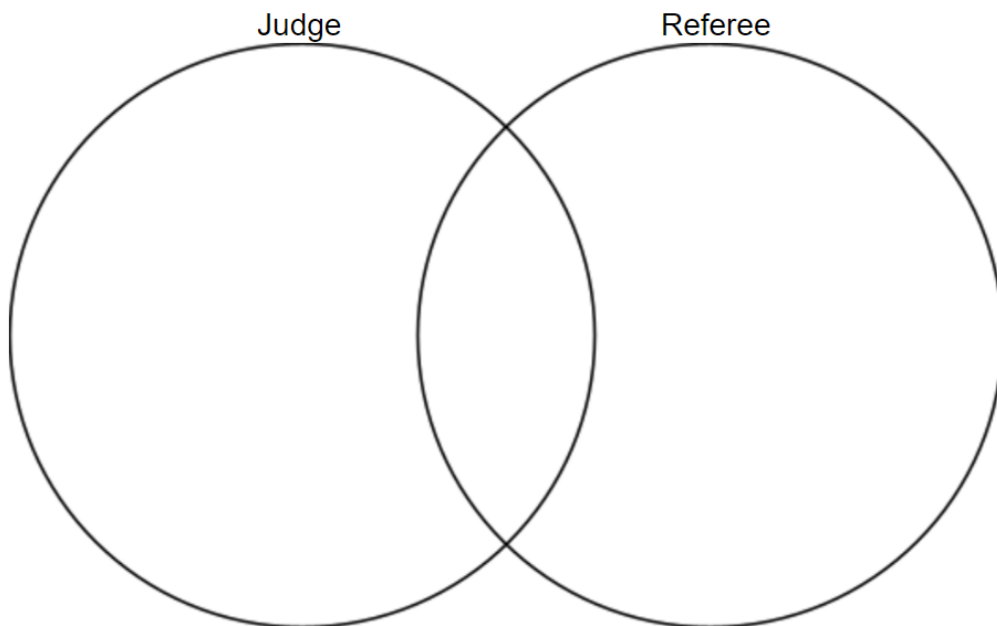
3. When the country was first founded, it wasn't clear what the powers of the Supreme Court would be. How did the role of the judicial branch change under the leadership of Justice John Marshall?
4. A judge's job is not to do what is popular or what will make people happy. What is the main responsibility of a judge?
5. Justices are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate to serve on the court for the rest of their lives, or at least until they retire. Why are justices appointed and not elected?

6. What was the name of the first court case that declared a law passed by Congress to be unconstitutional?

7. What does it mean for a law to be unconstitutional?

8. How is it possible for laws to be passed that are unconstitutional?

9. *Make Connections:* Fill in the Venn diagram below, comparing and contrasting judges and referees.

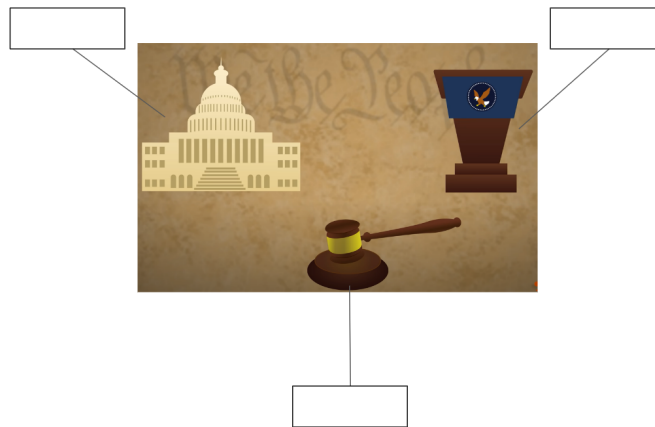


Answer Key

1. What is a chief justice?

Answer: A chief justice is the highest-ranking lead judge who presides over the United States Supreme Court.

2. Label the three branches of government. Who makes up each branch?



Answer:

- **Legislative Branch, made up of Congress (the House of Representatives and the Senate)**
- **Executive Branch, led by the president**
- **Judicial Branch, made up of the Supreme Court**

3. When the country was first founded, it wasn't clear what the powers of the Supreme Court would be. How did the role of the judicial branch change under the leadership of Justice John Marshall?

Answer: The Supreme Court wasn't as powerful a branch of government in comparison to the Executive Branch, led by the president, and the Legislative Branch, made up of Congress. But as chief justice, Justice John Marshall worked hard to make the Supreme Court a governing body equal to the other two branches, that would settle disputes in a neutral way.

4. A judge's job is not to do what is popular or what will make people happy. What is the main responsibility of a judge?

Answer: A judge's job is to make well-thought-out decisions that are in alignment with the Constitution, nothing more and nothing less.

5. Justices are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate to serve on the court for the rest of their lives, or at least until they retire. Why are justices appointed and not elected?

Answer: The Court was designed that way so outside political pressures wouldn't influence the judges' decision-making.

6. What was the name of the first court case that declared a law passed by Congress to be unconstitutional?

Answer: Marbury vs. Madison

7. What does it mean for a law to be unconstitutional?

Answer: It means that the law goes against what is stated in the Constitution.

8. How is it possible for laws to be passed that are unconstitutional?

Answer: It mainly has to do with how people interpret the laws. It is emphatically the duty of the Judicial Department to say what the law is. Some legislators try to bend the laws to serve their interests, which is not true justice.

9. *Make Connections*: Fill in the Venn diagram below, comparing and contrasting judges and referees.

Possible Answers

