

Lesson 3

A Look at the Current Court

Objectives: Students will consider important characteristics of Supreme Court justices including judicial temperament.

Handouts: (1) Bios of the Current Court; (2) *Judicial Temperament* article by Hon. James Duffy, Jr.; (3) ABA - Gavel Guidelines.

Extensions: Lessons from *Street Law: The Challenge of Selecting an Ideal Supreme Court Nominee* by Cathy Ruffing, teacher, and *Nominating Federal Judges* by Rebecca Small, teacher.

A. Daily Warm-Up and Current Events Alert!

Check National Constitution Center's website for relevant and timely current event news alerts. www.constitutioncenter.org.

B. Who Are the Current Justices?

Distribute Handout 1, Biographies of the Current Court, to nine small groups. Each small group focuses on one justice. The group reports to the class about "their justice."

For more detail, see CSpan's main resource directory of judiciary resources. It will link the researcher to profiles for each justice: www.c-span.org/resources/judiciary.asp.

C. Questions to Think About

Balancing the Court

Some urge that the court should be balanced in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, experiences, philosophies (for more on judicial philosophy, see Lesson 4). Do you agree or disagree with a balancing test? Why or why not?

Judicial Temperament

What about "judicial temperament?" What do you think it is? Where does it fit in the chart? How important is it when selecting a justice? How can it be measured? (This consideration urged by Susan Leeson, Oregon Supreme Court, Retired.) See Handouts 2 and 3 for the comments by a State Supreme Court judge (concise, readable article on meaning of judicial temperament) and the ABA (interesting, detailed list), respectively.

Ranking

Teachers: after discussion of the concepts, consider making this a ranking exercise - individually, small groups, or as a class.

D. Vocabulary

Add to the list: judicial temperament.

E. Extended Activities, Homework, Journal Entry

Extensions

1. Write a help wanted advertisement for the position of Supreme Court justice.
2. Label a body. This is from Melanie Morris, West Sylvan Middle School teacher, divide into groups with about four students in each. On large butcher paper, one student gets his or her body traced on the paper. Then label the parts need to be a good justice. Example: brain for wisdom and knowledge, backbone for standing up for what's right, etc.
3. Street Law lessons: *The Challenge of Selecting an Ideal Supreme Court Nominee* and *Nominating Federal Judges*.

Homework/Journal

1. Write about the justice you learned about. What impressed you most and why?
2. Discuss what experience, skills, or characteristics are most important for a justice, or the *next* justice. (Is there a difference? Why or why not?)
3. Describe *judicial temperament*.