



*West Pediment Detail, Supreme Court Building. Photograph by John Neubauer.
Courtesy of the Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.*

EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW

Read the words, “Equal Justice Under Law,” written across the front of the Supreme Court building. Think about this phrase and discuss these questions in class.

What does “equal justice” mean? What does “under law” mean?

Should everyone be treated equally in court? Why or why not?

Should everyone have to obey the same laws? Why or why not?

The Judicial Branch



The Supreme Court

One important value in American society is that everyone has equal justice under the law. Another important idea is the “rule of law.” The rule of law means that everyone must obey the law and no one is above the law. This means that the government and its leaders must also obey the law.

Our Constitution was written in 1787. The writers of the Constitution wanted a government that was ruled by laws, not by men. They wanted to create a system of government where no branch has too much power. But they understood

that they did not know all the problems the country might have in the future. They wanted to make sure that future leaders created laws that followed the Constitution.

The judicial branch of government does this job. One responsibility of our judicial system is to explain and review laws in the United States. Another is to resolve disagreements between individuals or groups. The courts also decide if a law goes against the Constitution. If a law goes against the Constitution, it is called “unconstitutional.”

Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. What is the “rule of law”? _____
2. When was the Constitution written? _____
3. Name one branch or part of the government. _____
4. What does the judicial branch do? _____

The U.S. Supreme Court

The U.S. Supreme Court is the highest court in the country. The Supreme Court has nine justices, or judges. The writers of the Constitution wanted the Supreme Court justices to make court decisions based on law, not politics. Therefore, these justices are not elected. Instead, they are nominated by the President and approved by the Senate. These justices serve for life or until they retire.

The Chief Justice of the United States is the highest ranking official in the judicial branch. The current Chief Justice is John G. Roberts, Jr.

The Supreme Court has a unique role in the federal government. The Supreme Court explains the meaning of the Constitution when it reviews laws. If people do not agree with a law, they can challenge the law in court. If the Supreme Court

agrees that the law follows the Constitution, then it continues as a law. If the Supreme Court decides that the law does not follow the Constitution, then the law is no longer valid. These decisions affect everyone in the United States. The Supreme Court's decisions are final and all other laws must follow them.



*Chief Justice
John G. Roberts, Jr.
Courtesy of the
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of the United States.*

Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. What is the highest court in the United States? _____
2. How many justices are on the Supreme Court? _____
3. Who is the Chief Justice of the United States now? _____



Discuss these questions with your class.

How does the court system work in your native country?

How is it similar to or different from courts in the United States?

Civics Test Questions—Judicial Branch

Read the test questions and write the answers. Take turns practicing them with your partner.

1. Name one branch or part of the government. _____
2. What does the judicial branch do? _____
3. What is the highest court in the United States? _____
4. How many justices are on the Supreme Court? _____
5. Who is the Chief Justice of the United States now? _____
6. When was the Constitution written? _____
7. What is the “rule of law”? _____



For more information on the U.S. Supreme Court justices, visit www.supremecourt.gov/about/biographies.aspx.