

The Judicial Branch

By David Jakstas

Jury Duty

Ms. Patel had just come home from her day at federal district court.

“What happened, Mom?” Dev asked.

“Did you find someone guilty?”

“Dev, I was summoned for jury duty, but that does not mean that I was chosen for the jury,” Mom explained.

“Why did they ask you to appear for jury duty if you were not going to be on a jury?” Dev asked.

“The attorneys got to select 12 jurors for the case from a larger pool, or group, of people,” Mom continued.

“How did they choose who got to be on the jury?” asked Dev.

“The attorneys and the judge asked jurors questions to learn more information about them,” Mom said. “One of the attorneys was a woman I went to college with, so I got dismissed.”

“Why would you be dismissed for that?” Dev wondered.

“Because we were friends, and that means I may not be impartial,” Mom explained. “It would not have been fair to the other side’s case to have me on the jury.”



The U.S. Supreme Court

Did You Know?

The Supreme Court can decide if a law is constitutional. A famous case is *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Lawyers argued that having separate but equal schools for Black students violated the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. In 1954, the Supreme Court agreed and ruled it unconstitutional. The Court ruled that separate schools meant that Black students did not have equal opportunities. This decision led to students of all races being allowed to attend school together.

The Judicial Branch

The U.S. government has three separate but equal branches, or parts. Each branch has a different role, but no role is more powerful than the other. One branch of the government is the judicial branch. This branch includes the courts.

One role of the judicial branch is to review the laws made by the legislative branch. The courts help decide if laws are constitutional. If not, they can strike them down.

Courts also decide whether or not someone broke the law. District courts decide if a person committed a crime and if so, what the punishment should be. Someone convicted can question the decision in appeals court. If the party loses the appeal but believes the law was unfair or being applied wrongly, they can ask the Supreme Court to hear the case. If the Supreme Court feels it is worth looking into, then the case is heard there.

The courts also help settle disputes between people who cannot resolve the disputes themselves.

Appealing to the Supreme Court

Two people argued and took legal action. Neither agreed to disagree. Neither got satisfaction.

They went to court to have the matter decided. The attorneys argued and the judge presided.

A ruling was made and one party won. But the legal process had just begun.

The losers were mad and kept spinning their wheels. Then they took the whole case to the Court of Appeals.

The higher court became concerned. Some facts were not proven so the decision was overturned.

Was the case constitutional? The question would remain. Both parties had everything to lose and a lot more to gain.

This famous case had a lot of support. A decision was then called on from the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court agreed to hear the trial. They made a decision and their ruling was final.

