

Lesson: Analyzing Supreme Court Decisions

Class Prep for Students: Study and Work Before Class

This lesson recommends that students spend time reviewing and studying specific print and Internet resources to build background knowledge and understanding so they are best prepared for class.

Therefore, a class prep assignment sheet is provided with the lesson.

During preparation time, students will read and analyze the summary of one of the Supreme Court cases included in this lesson.

Ideally, a single folder with the print resources and worksheets for before-class preparation should be loaded and made available to the students so they have at least one night to prepare and complete two worksheets before the class lesson.

DAY 1: Anatomy of a Supreme Court Opinion

Guided by the teacher, the class will analyze and dissect the Supreme Court case reviewed for class prep to develop a more complete profile of the case. After guided instruction, the other cases will be divided among the students for analysis and study as homework. Students may work independently or with a partner to complete the work.

Goal: Through text, format, and content analysis of a Supreme Court case, students will learn about the following:

- Citations, codes, abbreviations, form, and formatting features
- Information gathering from legal records
- Background story and facts about the case
- How students are involved
- Reasoning behind the majority and dissenting opinions
- How Supreme Court Justices arrive at their decisions
- Issues involved: Constitutional, societal, education, student rights, etc.
- Precedents and their role in the case
- The judicial process through the state and federal courts
- Final ruling of the Supreme Court
- Timeline

Materials/Equipment Needed:

Included with this lesson:

- Anatomy of a Supreme Court Opinion (Teacher's Guide)
- Anatomy of a Supreme Court Opinion (Student Worksheet)—1 per student
- Full text pdf of Supreme Court decision
- Make several copies of the remaining cases which will be distributed so each student gets 1 case to review for homework.
 - Profile a Supreme Court Case
 - Diagram It—Conflict Resolution the Legal Way

1. Students should have completed the assigned worksheets as part of class prep so they have a basic understanding of the Supreme Court Case that will be analyzed in greater detail during class.

2. Review the case briefly with the class.

3. Discuss the value of reading a summary, but also note its limitations and the need to look at the full text of the opinion.

Point out that a summary does not provide all the facts of a case and quoting from a summary would never be accepted in a court of law.

4. Provide this information about finding sources for Supreme Court opinions:

- There are official and unofficial sources for Supreme Court opinions. The only official source is the print version that appears in bound volumes of the United States Reports. Because discrepancies could

appear when an electronic version of the printed volume is made, the Supreme Court website issues this caution:

“Caution: Only the printed bound volumes of the United States Reports contain the final, official opinions of the Supreme Court of the United States. In case of discrepancies between a bound volume and the materials included here--or any other version of the same materials, whether print or electronic, official or unofficial--the printed bound volume controls.”

<http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/boundvolumes.aspx>

- When Supreme Court opinions are published by unofficial publishers, the publishers may add headers, or notations to help with understanding, but these are not part of the official record and should never be quoted.

- The Supreme Court opinion used in class today is the electronic version of “the real thing” from the United States Record.

5. Using the Teacher’s Guide, discuss each place noted in the Supreme Court opinion.

6. Students take notes and use highlighters to mark key phrases in the text provided on their “anatomy” worksheet. When finished they will use their notes to add additional details to the profile and diagram completed for class prep.

7. • Profile a Supreme Court Case

- Diagram It—Conflict Resolution the Legal Way

1. Divide the other case summaries among the students and give each a copy of 1 case summary. More than one student will work on a case.

2. Point out how students can use the citation of the case to find the electronic copy from the United States Record (official source) at this link:

<http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/boundvolumes.aspx>

They may also follow the link provided in the summary that will help them find the full text of the case from an unofficial source.

DAY 2: More Cases, More Help Solving Problems

In jigsaw fashion, students complete a summary matrix for all Supreme Court decisions based on the information other students share about their specific case studies. The matrix of cases is then analyzed to make observations, draw conclusions, and gain insight into the trends of the voting rights laws and the position of the Supreme Court on these issues.

Goal: Analyze the information in the matrix of cases to make observations, draw conclusions, and gain insight into the role of the judiciary, the nature of the judicial process, the limits of judicial powers, conflict resolution in a constitutional democracy, and Supreme Court decisions related to the rights of students.

Materials/Equipment Needed:

- Computer with Internet access and projector for class viewing.
- All student-completed case profiles and conflict resolution diagrams. (Each of the cases should be represented.)
- Summary Matrix for Supreme Court Cases Involving Students, included (1 copy per student)
- Take-Home Quiz, included

Procedure:

1. Divide up the class into small groups with like cases then distribute the matrix to the class.
2. Discuss the different columns then ask the students to briefly fill in the line for the case they already studied together in class.
3. Explain that everyone will be contributing to the development of the matrix, then give each group a few minutes to collaborate and fill in the appropriate line for their case.
4. As students are working, write these “Case Questions” on the board for discussion after each group presents:
 - 1) Were the rights expanded or limited by the Supreme Court decision?
 - 2) How do you think this decision was received by the respondent and petitioner?

- 3) How does this decision affect you?
- 4) The decision resolved a dispute, but did it solve the source of the problem? Explain.
- 5) How would you have voted? Why?
5. After all groups have shared and the matrix is complete, analyze the chart to notice patterns, make observations, and draw conclusions.
6. Discuss these "General Questions."
 - 1) Reflect on the time it took to get the dispute resolved.
 - a) Was justice served? Explain.
 - b) Who benefits from Supreme Court decisions? Explain.