Name: _____

The Judicial Branch

The United States has three distinct, or different and special, branches of government. Laws are made in the legislative branch. Laws are carried out by the executive branch. But who decides what laws mean? Or how laws apply to an individual situation or problem? That's where the judicial branch comes in.

Judicial comes from the word *judge*. The judicial branch only handles federal laws passed by Congress, not regular crimes. And they can't look at laws on their own. Someone needs to have a problem with a law and make a court case for them to judge. They interpret the Constitution and the laws, or figure out and decide what they mean. There are 94 judicial districts per state or territory, and 94 in total. They judge a case and make a decision about whether the federal law is correctly applied.

Preview
Please log in to download
the printable version of this worksheet.

If lawyers don't like the decision, they can appeal it. If they do, it goes to one of the 13 U.S. circuit courts. These are also called appellate courts because they only handle appeals, not new cases. Most circuit courts represent three or more states. If lawyers still want to appeal, they can ask the Supreme Court to hear their case. But the circuit court decision, or ruling, is usually final. That's because so few cases make it into the "Marble Palace" each year.

Sometimes two circuit courts disagree. Sometimes the law in question is especially important. The Supreme Court can decide to rule on those cases. If the problem was at the federal level to begin with, like a problem between two states, then they are the first to hear it. The Constitution doesn't require the number of judges, called justices, on the Supreme Court. However, there have been nine since 1869. Their leader is called the Chief Justice. Their ruling is final. It cannot be appealed. Any lower courts must use their ruling as precedent, or a guideline, when making future decisions.

Judges in the judicial branch are not elected by the public. They are appointed by the President and approved by the Senate. They serve in their position until they retire, die, or are removed for committing a crime.

Name: _____

The Judicial Branch

1. The main jobs of the judicial branch are to

   _____ the Constitution and laws, and to

   _____ if laws are being applied correctly.

2. Fill in the blanks to show how a regular court case would move through the three levels of federal courts.

   _____ → _____ → _____

Super Teacher Worksheets
Preview
Please log in to download
the printable version of this worksheet.

c. the Circuit Justice
d. the Attorney General

5. Which of the following is *not* true about Supreme Court rulings?
   - **a.** They cannot be appealed.
   - **b.** They become precedent for future court cases.
   - **c.** Usually more than 7,000 court cases that ask for them every year never get them.
   - **d.** They can be made about any law at any time, without warning.

6. Reread the following sentences from the article.

   > *But the circuit court decision, or ruling, is usually final. That's because so few cases make it into the "Marble Palace" each year.*

   Using context clues from the sentences and the rest of the article, what can you infer the "Marble Palace" is?

   _____

Name: _____

The Judicial Branch

Fill in the missing letters to create a vocabulary word from the article. Then write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1. ____ **i r** ____ ____ **i t**
   clue: *type of court at the middle level of the federal court system*

1. _____

2. ____ **u s** ____ ____ **e**

2. _____

Super Teacher Worksheets
Preview
Please log in to download the printable version of this worksheet.

5. **i** ____ ____ **e r** ____ **r e** ____
   clue: *to figure out and decide what something means*

5. _____

6. **d** ____ ____ **t** ____ **n c** ____
   clue: *different and special; separate*

6. _____

7. ____ ____ **p e l** ____ **a** ____ ____
   clue: *handles appeals; another name for circuit courts*

7. _____

8. ____ ____ **l i n** ____
   clue: *a judge's decision on a case*

8. _____

9. ____ **r e** ____ ____ **d** ____ **n t**
   clue: *a guideline for judging court cases based on earlier rulings*

9. _____

10. **j** ____ ____ **i c** ____ **a** ____
    clue: *relating to judges and courtrooms*

10. _____

Name: _____

The Judicial Branch

In the article, "The Judicial Branch," you learned about the federal court system.

Pretend you are talking with someone who is part of a court case about a federal law. They are about to take their case to a district court and don't know how it works. Using information you learned in the article, write an explanation about the process so they'll know what to expect. (Assume they will want to appeal the courts' decisions.)

Preview
Please log in to download
the printable version of this worksheet.

ANSWER KEY

The Judicial Branch

1. The main jobs of the judicial branch are to

   ___interpret___ the Constitution and laws, and to

   ___decide___ if laws are being applied correctly.

2. Fill in the blanks to show how a regular court case would move through the three levels of federal courts.

   ___district court___ → ___circuit/ appellate court___ → ___Supreme Court___

Preview
Please log in to download the printable version of this worksheet.

c. the Circuit Justice d. the Attorney General

5. Which of the following is *not* true about Supreme Court rulings?

   a. They cannot be appealed.

   b. They become precedent for future court cases.

   c. Usually more than 7,000 court cases that ask for them every year never get them.

   d. They can be made about any law at any time, without warning.

6. Reread the following sentences from the article.

   > *But the circuit court decision, or ruling, is usually final. That's because so few cases make it into the "Marble Palace" each year.*

   Using context clues from the sentences and the rest of the article, what can you infer the "Marble Palace" is?

   ___It is the place where the Supreme Court works.___

ANSWER KEY

The Judicial Branch

Fill in the missing letters to create a vocabulary word from the article. Then write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1. _c_ir_c_ _u_it
   clue: *type of court at the middle level of the federal court system*

1. circuit

2. j u s t i c e

2. justice

Super Teacher Worksheets
Preview
Please log in to download the printable version of this worksheet.

5. i_n_t_er_p_re_t
   clue: *to figure out and decide what something means*

5. interpret

6. d_i_s_t_i_nc_t
   clue: *different and special; separate*

6. distinct

7. _a_ _p_pel_l_a_t_ _e_
   clue: *handles appeals; another name for circuit courts*

7. appellate

8. _r_ _u_lin_g_
   clue: *a judge's decision on a case*

8. ruling

9. _p_re_c_ _e_d_e_nt
   clue: *a guideline for judging court cases based on earlier rulings*

9. precedent

10. j_u_ _d_ic_i_a_l_
    clue: *relating to judges and courtrooms*

10. judicial