

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



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decision about whether the legislation is correctly applied.

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.

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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.



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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?

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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. ___ir___it

clue: type of court at the middle level of the federal court system

1. _____



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clue: to figure out and decide what something means

6. d ___ t ___ n c ___

clue: different and special; separate

6. _____

7. ___ pel ___ a ___

clue: handles appeals; another name for circuit courts

7. _____

8. ___ lin ___

clue: a judge's decision on a case

8. _____

9. ___ re ___ d ___ nt

clue: a guideline for judging court cases based on earlier rulings

9. _____

10. j ___ ic ___ a ___

clue: relating to judges and courtrooms

10. _____

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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.)



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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.

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clue: a guideline for judging court cases based on earlier rulings

10. j u d i c i a l

clue: relating to judges and courtrooms

7. _____ **precedent**

10. _____ **judicial**