You Be the Judge

An Interactive Introduction to Ohio's Courts and Judicial Decision-Making

www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/YouBetheJudge

Educator Activity Introduction & Standards Connections

Activity at a Glance

An interactive learning experience where students move from trial court judge, to a three-judge court of appeals panel, to justice on the Supreme Court of Ohio. At each level, they evaluate facts and arguments, apply rules and law, and make decisions that affect how the case proceeds. The activity takes about 10 to 25 minutes on average to complete.

Purpose of the Activity

"You Be the Judge" turns the journey of cases through Ohio's judicial system into an active decision-making experience. Rather than only reading about courts, students step into the role of a judge and follow a fictional school-discipline dispute through the trial court, court of appeals, and Supreme Court of Ohio. Along the way, students must listen to competing accounts of what happened, distinguish important facts from less important details, interpret a rule and a legal definition, weigh attorneys' arguments, and reach a reasoned decision. The activity is especially well suited to upper-elementary, middle-school, and high-school civics instruction and connects to Ohio's Social Studies standards.

The activity is designed to help students understand that judging is a process of applying the law to facts, not simply choosing the outcome that feels most appealing.

Educational Value

- **Makes government concrete.** Students experience the judicial branch as a working institution with different levels, roles, procedures, and responsibilities.
- **Builds evidence-based reasoning.** Students repeatedly compare testimony, facts, rules, definitions, and competing arguments before selecting an outcome.
- **Develops civic attitudes.** The activity emphasizes open-mindedness, fairness, careful listening, impartiality, and the responsibility to explain decisions using evidence and law.
- **Encourages understanding of different viewpoints.** Students encounter more than one reasonable interpretation of the same facts and see how judges question attorneys and deliberate with colleagues.
- **Supports discussion and writing.** Teachers can ask students to defend a ruling, identify the strongest evidence, compare the roles of each court level, or explain how a different interpretation of a fact could change the outcome.
- **Provides a memorable Ohio connection.** By tracing a case through Ohio's judicial system ending at the Supreme Court of Ohio, the activity connects abstract civics concepts to students' own state government.

Connections to Ohio's Learning Standards for Social Studies

The experience has its strongest connections to the Government standards and to the disciplinary skills involved in evaluating information, considering perspectives, making reasoned decisions, and supporting a position with evidence.

Grade/Course	Ohio Social Studies Standards	"You Be the Judge" Connection
Grade 4	**Government Roles and Systems of Government Standard 15:** The Ohio Constitution and the United States Constitution established a limited government by dividing it into three distinct branches, each with specific responsibilities.	Students focus on one branch in depth and see the judiciary perform its distinct responsibility of resolving disputes and interpreting/applying law.
Grade 5	**Social Studies Skills Civic Engagement Standard 4:** Civic participation in a democratic society involves making informed and reasoned decisions by evaluating, using, and discussing information.	Students evaluate testimony, arguments, rules, state law, and definitions, then make and can defend a reasoned ruling.
Grade 6	**Social Studies Skills Civic Engagement Standard 4:** Individuals can understand public issues by collecting and interpreting information from multiple sources. Evaluating bias and credibility in sources ensures that individuals consume and communicate accurate information.	Students compare accounts and attorney arguments, consider what information is persuasive, and distinguish assertions from supporting facts.
Grade 7	**Social Studies Skills Civic Engagement Standard 3:** Individuals and groups shape their perspectives based on the context and events of the time. Analyzing these perspectives helps individuals create and communicate a position.	The game requires students to consider competing perspectives and select a position supported by the case record.
Grade 8	**Social Studies Skills Historical Thinking Standard 1:** Presenting and defending a position requires evidence from multiple perspectives using credible primary and secondary sources. Positions are revised as new questions are asked, and new evidence is introduced.	Students act as decision-makers who must weigh multiple perspectives and justify a conclusion based on the evidence presented.
High School American Government	**Civic Participation and Skills Standard 3:** Issues can be analyzed through the critical use of credible sources. **Basic Principles of the U.S. Constitution Standard 5:** As the supreme law of the land, the U.S. Constitution incorporates basic principles that help define the government of the United States as a federal republic including its structure, powers, and relationship with the governed. **Ohio's State and Local Governments Standard 16:** As a framework for the state, the Ohio Constitution has similarities and differences to the federal Constitution; it was changed in 1851 to address difficulties governing the state.	Students practice evidence-based analysis while examining the judicial function, appellate review, oral argument, and the broader effect of a Supreme Court of Ohio decision.

Suggested Learning Objectives

After completing the activity, students should be able to:

- Describe the basic progression of a case from an Ohio trial court to a court of appeals and, in appropriate cases, to the Supreme Court of Ohio.
- Explain differences between the work of a trial judge, an appellate judge, and a justice.
- Use facts, rules, legal definitions, and arguments to support a judicial decision.
- Compare competing interpretations of evidence and explain why reasonable decision-makers may disagree.
- Explain why judicial fairness requires listening carefully, remaining open-minded, and applying the law to the facts.
- Describe in introductory terms how appellate decisions and precedents contribute to consistency in the law.

Instructional Use

The activity can be used as an introduction to the judicial branch, as a formative check during a government unit, or as an application activity after students have learned the basic structure of Ohio government. It works particularly well when teachers pause at decision points and require students to state not only what they would decide, but why. It takes about 10-25 minutes for students to complete the activity.

To start the activity, go to www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/YouBetheJudge. A short video by Chief Justice Sharon L. Kennedy will introduce the activity. From there, students will begin the simulation.

- **Before playing:** Ask students what they believe judges do and what qualities they think a fair judge should possess. Have them predict how a case might move through Ohio's courts.
- **During the activity:** Pause after major pieces of evidence or argument. Ask: What fact matters most right now? What information is still unclear? What rule or definition controls the decision? What would you ask an attorney or witness?
- **After playing:** Have students explain whether their reasoning changed as the case moved through the courts. Ask them to compare trial and appellate decision-making and to support their final ruling with specific evidence and law from the activity.

Possible Assessments

- A short written judicial opinion stating the students' ruling and citing the facts and rules that support it.
- A flowchart showing the case's path through Ohio's court system and the role of each court.
- A claim-evidence-reasoning response explaining whether the student believes the conduct met the activity's definition of "deception."
- A reflection comparing the student's first impression of the dispute with the final decision after reviewing the full record and arguments.