

## **Justice for a Day: Learning About the West Virginia Supreme Court Justices**

### **Subjects**

West Virginia  
Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia  
Judicial System  
Justice  
Architect Cass Gilbert's West Virginia Supreme Court Chamber design

### **Grades**

8-12

### **Brief Description**

After watching the DVD, *The Foundation of Justice: Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia*, students will work in groups to research West Virginia's current Supreme Court Justices. A nominated member of each group will then serve as a justice by reading a short biography written by the group.

### **Objectives**

Students will

- Learn about West Virginia's court system and the justices themselves;
- Research the current justices by means of the Internet;
- Work in groups to create short biographies about each justice;
- Learn group team work by electing one member to serve as the justice and read biography to the class.

### **Keywords**

*West Virginia, judicial system, justice, game, DVD, Internet*

### **Materials Needed**

- DVD: *The Foundation of Justice: Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia*
- Internet
- Computers
- Five slips of paper with the names of the current West Virginia Supreme Court Justices

### **Lesson Plan**

This game gives students a fun and interactive way to learn about the judicial system and the West Virginia Supreme Court Justices. By first researching and then acting as a Justice, students are able to relate better to the justices and judicial system.

Students will first watch the DVD, *The Foundation of Justice: Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia*. This film gives students an understanding of the judicial process, the West Virginia Supreme Court Justices, how they obtain and keep their positions, and a

view of the West Virginia Supreme Chamber. After watching the DVD, have students break off into five groups. Have a member of each group draw a justice's name. Tell students that they will now have to research the justice, creating a short biography about him/her; they will then nominate a member of their group to serve as the justice and read the biography to the class in the first person as if the student is the justice.

Allow students to use the computers and Internet to research their justice. Have them go to

- <http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/>
- Underneath the heading "Supreme Court of Appeals" click on "Justices & Staff"
- The students can then click on each justice's name for a short biography

Have the students answer specific questions about the justices or create their own short summary using the given information. The teacher should review the biographies before the students to ensure that all questions can be answered.

Possible questions to ask:

- Where is the justice from or where was he or she born?
- When was the justice elected?
- What was his or her former career or specialization?

Students should create biographies written in the first person of about two or three paragraphs in length. All five of the nominated members will then sit before the class in the correct order of the justices. The Chief Justice is seated in the center of the justices. The most senior justice after the Chief sits to his or her right. The least senior member of the Court is seated in the chair on the Chief Justice's very far left. Each student will then act as his or her justice reading the biography to the class. Students can choose to dress as the justices if they like; graduation gowns and choir robes work well.

Additional suggestions:

- For a more challenging activity, have students research and perform as West Virginia's first justices: William Harrison, Ralph Berkshire, and James Henry Brown.

Students may use computers and the Internet to research the first justices. Have them go to

- <http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/2009Brochure.pdf>;
- Have students browse the 2009 West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals Brochure;
- Have students read the article beginning on page twelve.

- Have students memorize the names of all five current West Virginia Supreme Court Justices and quiz them.

- For a longer-term class project, have students visit the Supreme Court LAWS program Web site <http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/LAWS/lawsCover.htm> to learn about the LAWS (Legal Advancement for West Virginia Students) program.

They can read the documents for one of the cases high school students studied in the last three years. The cases and documents can be found at the following links

[http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/calendar/april17\\_07ad.htm](http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/calendar/april17_07ad.htm)

[http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/calendar/april15\\_08ad.htm](http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/calendar/april15_08ad.htm)

[http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/calendar/march24\\_09ad.htm](http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/calendar/march24_09ad.htm)

The Argument Docket for each LAWS court day lists the cases on the docket for that day, and each case listed contains links to all the documents filed in that case.

Students can study a case, take the part of attorneys on each side, and perform a mock Supreme Court argument, with other students playing the part of Supreme Court justices. Students can then discuss how they think the case would turn out, then look up the opinion on the Supreme Court Clerk's Web site at

<http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/opinions.htm>

### **Assessment**

Students learn about and memorize the current or past West Virginia Supreme Court Justices. They practice good work skills by participating in group work. They learn to navigate a Web site and use the Internet as a research method.