

A black and white photograph of a grand, classical building, likely a courthouse, featuring a portico with several tall, fluted columns. An American flag is flying on a pole to the left of the entrance. The building has a pediment with a central relief sculpture. The foreground shows a set of stone steps leading up to the entrance.

Connecticut Courts

*An Interactive Curriculum
for
High School Students*

Developed by the *Connecticut Judicial Branch*

Coordinated By
The Justice Education Center

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Preface

“...freedom often depends upon the fearless judge. Judicial independence has a long history in Connecticut, where the British colonists rebelled because judges were beholden to King George III. The evils done by puppet judges directed by tyrants such as Hitler and Stalin resulted in the wholesale slaughter of countless innocent people. History teaches that we must resist that evil.”

Hon. Francis M. McDonald, Jr.
Chief Justice, Connecticut Supreme Court
June 5, 2000

The Connecticut Judicial Branch, a third and separate branch of our state government, is responsible for maintaining the rule of law in our society through the courts. This means that we ask our courts to determine whether persons accused of crimes by the state are guilty or not guilty and we ask our courts to resolve the private disputes of citizens, such as those between landlords and tenants, husbands and wives, and buyers and sellers. Most importantly, our courts are responsible for reviewing laws enacted and approved by the legislative and executive branches of the government to ensure that they comply with our highest laws -- the constitutions of the United States and the State of Connecticut.

Maintaining the rule of law requires that the judges of our courts be able to decide cases strictly in accordance with the law, uninfluenced by changing public opinion or pressure from other sources. As the *Amistad* case illustrates, even the President of the United States is subject to the rule of law and may not direct a judge to depart from it. This principle is embedded in the process by which our judges are selected and appointed. Attorney Joseph A. Mengacci, the chairman of Connecticut’s Judicial Selection Commission recently stated, "What we all want and need in Connecticut’s courts are judges who will make decisions based not on public opinion, but on sound legal principles.”

The authority of our courts to make and enforce decisions in the thousands of cases that come before them rests ultimately on the public’s trust and confidence in the judicial system as a whole. In 1998, the Connecticut Judicial Branch conducted a survey to determine the level of public trust and confidence in our judicial system and to recommend strategies to improve the public’s knowledge of that system. The survey indicated that confidence levels are highest among people who have had some experience with the system and that many people do not know enough about the system to form an opinion. This curriculum project was initiated in response to the need for effective and dynamic ways to provide information on our court system.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Curriculum

The purpose of this curriculum, entitled, *Connecticut Courts*, is to provide high school students with a thorough understanding of the rule of law, the role of the courts and the structure and function of the Connecticut Judicial Branch as it relates to the two other independent branches of government. This curriculum project was developed by the Connecticut Judicial Branch, and coordinated by the Justice Education Center, a private, non-profit organization which provides research and information on issues related to criminal justice. The design team consisted of three Connecticut high school social studies/history teachers, a history professor from the University of Connecticut, a Superior Court judge, two professional staff members of the Judicial Branch, and an education consultant from the Justice Education Center. The team met regularly from April to September of 2000 to develop the finished product.

Recognizing the challenges that high school teachers face in meeting existing district curriculum goals, *Connecticut Courts* was developed to be easily incorporated into high school government or United States history classes in seven, 40-minute segments or three 90-minute blocks, with the option of unlimited expansion and exploration. *Connecticut Courts* includes recommendations for activities, extensive resources and an extended bibliography to support additional study and investigation of this critical subject matter.

Included in this curriculum is information published by the Connecticut Judicial Branch which includes descriptions of the Branch's Speaker's Bureau and Court Visitation Program as well as a factual booklet entitled, *Connecticut Court Process*.

Compliance with the Connecticut State Social Studies Curriculum Framework

This curriculum fulfills critical components of the Connecticut State Social Studies Curriculum Framework. In terms of program goals, *Connecticut Courts* encourages students to "demonstrate knowledge of how people create rules and laws to regulate the dynamic relationships of individual rights and societal needs." *Connecticut Courts* seeks to develop civic knowledge of the court system in all students, including those who may feel alienated or intimidated by the judicial structure.

Among the fifteen K-12 Content Standards in the Social Studies Framework, *Connecticut Courts* directly addresses the first seven goals. Under the subject of "History," the goals addressed include: (1) historical thinking; (2) local, U.S., and world history; (3) historical themes; and (4) applying history. Under the topic of "Civics and Government," the goals addressed include: (5) United States Constitution and government; (6) rights and responsibilities of citizens; and (7) political systems.

Introduction

FOCUS OF SUBJECT AREA

- The rule of law and the role of the courts;
- The role and responsibilities of the Connecticut Judicial Branch as it relates to the two other independent branches of government;
- The structure and function of the Judicial Branch in Connecticut;
- The functions of the critical personnel involved in the court process.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- Define law, the rule of law, justice and courts;
- Identify the three branches of government in the State of Connecticut and explain how the Judicial Branch differs from the other two independent branches of government;
- Describe the components of the Judicial Branch including the roles and responsibilities of the judge, jury and attorneys;
- Explain the Connecticut court structure and its various components;
- Identify court personnel;
- Analyze court cases that illustrate major concepts and the court process.

STRATEGIES

Students will learn about the Connecticut court system by:

- Reading required materials;
- Participating in class discussion, activities and optional field trips related to the subject areas;
- Viewing video presentations.

OVERVIEW OF LESSON ACTIVITIES

Length of Individual Segments: Segments One and Three require a minimum of two 40-minute periods of time or one 90-minute block. Segment Two requires three 40-minute periods of time or one and one half 90-minute blocks. These segments or block periods can be expanded to accommodate individual school district goals with additional activities, readings, research and field trips. The expansion of these lessons beyond the minimum class periods is strongly recommended.

ACTIVITIES FOR MINIMUM USE OF SEGMENTS

Students will:

- Read required written text;
- Study three Connecticut court cases that reflect how the judicial system works;
- Participate in discussions related to the content of the reading material and/or viewing of video presentations;
- Complete segment homework assignments;
- Complete a final assessment activity on material studied.

OPTIONAL EXPANDED OBJECTIVES

- Research and synthesize findings of court cases;
- Prepare and conduct a debate or a mock trial.

ASSESSMENT

Students will demonstrate their comprehension of minimal vocabulary, basic concepts and the role of the judiciary in Connecticut government by (1) constructing an essay; (2) creating a poster; (3) conducting or participating in a debate; or (4) conducting or participating in a mock trial. The essay, poster, debate or mock trial should reflect an understanding of class discussion, required reading and/or video content.

Introduction

EXPANDED ACTIVITIES BEYOND 40-MINUTE SEGMENTS

- Visit a court session through the Court Visitation Program sponsored by the Connecticut Bar Association, the Consortium for Law and Citizenship Education, and the Judicial Branch. For more information contact the Connecticut Bar Association at (860) 223-4400. (Appropriate for Segment 3)
- Engage in a discussion with outside visiting speakers (judges and representatives of the Judicial Branch). For more information about the Judicial Branch's Speaker's Bureau, contact the External Affairs Division of the Judicial Branch at (860) 757-2270. (Appropriate for Segment 3)
- Explore career possibilities through job shadowing. For more information, contact the Judicial Branch External Affairs Division at (860) 757-2270. (Appropriate for Segment 3)
- Complete extended research activities on subjects such as biographies of famous judicial figures and famous court cases. (Appropriate for Segment 1, 2 or 3)
- Follow a piece of legislation affecting the courts through the legislative process. For more information, access the Connecticut General Assembly's website at www.cga.state.ct.us. (Appropriate for Segment 2)
- Compare Connecticut's judicial system with other judicial systems throughout the United States and the world including tribal justice systems. (Appropriate for Segment 1, 2 or 3)
- Visit sites of historical significance to Connecticut court history, such as, The Old State House, Old Newgate Prison, The Prudence Crandall House, the Supreme Court and the replica of the Amistad vessel. (Appropriate for Segment 1)

For more information contact:

<u>Old State House</u>	800 Main Street, Hartford (860) 522-6766
<u>Old Newgate Prison</u>	Newgate Road, East Granby (860) 653-3563 or (860) 566-3005
<u>Prudence Crandall House</u>	Junctions of Routes 14 and 169, Canterbury (860) 546-9916 or (860) 566-3005
<u>The Supreme Court</u>	231 Capitol Avenue, Hartford (860) 757-2270
<u>Amistad Legacy</u>	www.Amistadamerica.org

- View additional videos and read/view supplementary texts of court cases, novels, short stories, and other related material. (Appropriate for Segment 1, 2 or 3)
- Maintain a journal of newspaper articles, editorials and/or current radio and television news coverage of a current court issue. (Appropriate for Segment 1, 2 or 3)

SEGMENT OVERVIEW & TIME ALLOCATION

Segment One: The Rule of Law and the *Amistad* case

Day One

- Class Discussion: Basic Facts of the *Amistad* case 40 minutes

Day Two

- Group Activity: Creating Definitions 20 minutes
- Class Analysis of Group Definitions 20 minutes

Homework: Essay on the *Amistad* case

Segment Two: The Role of the Courts and the Case of *Mary Jones*

Day One

- Class Discussion: Fundamental Questions 40 minutes

Day Two

- Group Activity: Determining Outcome of Case 40 minutes

Day Three

- Individual Group Presentations 15 minutes
- Class Analysis of Case Outcome 15 minutes
- Class Discussion: Resulting CT legislation 10 minutes

Homework: Written analysis of *Griswold v. Connecticut* or *Packer v. Board of Education*

Segment Three: The Connecticut Court Process and the *Michael T.* Case

Day One

- Video Presentation of “Pursuit of Justice” 20 minutes
- Class Discussion: Video Presentation 20 minutes

Day Two

- Video Presentation of “The Case of *Michael T.*” 20 minutes
- Class Activity: Determining Sentence for *Michael T.* 20 minutes

Homework: Assessment Project

Assessment Project: Essay, Poster, Debate or Mock Trial

Note: This overview provides suggested minimum allotment of time periods for the three segments in this curriculum. It does not include time allocations for *expanded* course activities. The outline is designed as a helpful reference only. Please modify the suggested minimum time allotments to address your individual course needs and objectives.