

KNOW ALL ABOUT THE COURTS¹

(Elementary Level)

Objectives: To clarify the role of the judiciary in the three branches of government. To inform students of the purpose of the courts. To compare and contrast the function of trial and appellate courts. To explain the various roles of people in the courts.

Materials needed: A copy of the video, *Know All About the Courts*. Sufficient copies of the handout. *Optional:* Access to the Internet.

Steps:

1. Ask the students to describe a court.
2. Explain that the video they are going to see will contain some information about the court system in Missouri.
3. Distribute the handouts. Read over the various items with the students and ask them to be thinking about them as they view the video.
4. View the video.
5. Have the students work in groups on the handout and have them record their answers.
6. Have the students watch the video to evaluate their answers.

Enrichment: Have the students visit the Supreme Court of Missouri website to find information for the bonus questions by visiting Your Missouri Courts website: <http://www.courts.mo.gov/>, click on "About the Courts" and select "Supreme Court."

(over)

¹ Lesson plan to accompany the video. The video is four minutes long.

Answers to the handout:

1. Missouri courts belong to the people of Missouri.
2. We need the courts to resolve/decide disputes/disagreements among people that they cannot settle themselves and to make sure that all people in Missouri are treated fairly and justly under the law.
3. The three branches of the government are the legislative branch, the executive branch and the judicial branch.
4. The legislative branch makes the law; the executive branch makes sure that the laws are carried out; and the judicial branch applies the law in specific cases to settle disputes people may have over the law.
5. The people who come to the courts are called parties.
6. Some examples of parties are juveniles, criminal defendants, parents, consumers, business people and drivers. (There are many examples.)
7. What do each of these people do in the court:
 - a. The lawyers help the parties tell their story.
 - b. Witnesses also help the parties tell their story; they tell what they know about the case.
 - c. The court reporter makes sure that everything that is said in court is recorded.
 - d. The judge makes sure that the trial is fair to everybody (by following the law and telling the jury what the law is).
 - e. The jury decides who should win a case. A juror must be 21 years old.
8. Cases begin in a circuit court, also called a trial court.
9. If the losing party does not agree with the trial court's decision and thinks a mistake was made, the party may take the case to an appellate court. (There are two levels of appeal: the court of appeals, which hears most appeals from the trial court, and the Supreme Court, which only hears the most important cases.)

Bonus question answers:

- 7e. Jurors in Missouri must be at least 21 years old.
1. Seven judges sit on the Supreme Court of Missouri.
 2. The chief justice is Richard B. Teitelman, until July 1, 2013.
 3. The other judges are Mary R. Russell, Patricia Breckenridge, Laura Denvir Stith, Zel M. Fischer

and George W. Draper III. (There currently is one vacancy on the Court.) (Biographies of the judges on the Court are available on the Court's website.)

4. The judges are selected through Missouri's nonpartisan court plan, also known as merit selection or the Missouri court plan. (This is a combination of application to and selection by a commission, appointment by the governor, and vote of the people.)