

The Judiciary in American Politics

Using Active Learning Strategies to
Engage Students in Learning about
the U.S. Court System

Christine Nemacheck
The College of William & Mary

Public Knowledge about the Courts

- Americans are relatively uninformed about the courts
- Americans see the courts, particularly the US Supreme Court, as political
- Favorability ratings have reached a record low

Teaching the Judiciary in American Politics

- Considering the judiciary along with case-related discussions
- Courts as political institutions

What is Active Learning?

- There are many definitions
- Key components:
 - Students are active instead of passive
 - Students are “doing” —not watching, listening or taking notes

Active Learning Strategies

- Most strategies involve some group component
- Students do best when they are given specific roles
- In most cases, setting a time-limit on group activities is crucial
- Assign students to groups when possible
- Benefits extend beyond active learning activities



About Federal Courts

Judges & Judgeships

Services & Forms

Court Records

Statistics & Reports

Rules & Policies

Email Updates

Court Locator

Careers

News

Search uscourts.gov



About Federal Courts

Educational Resources

You be the Judge

★ Educational Resources

Educational Activities

Supreme Court Landmarks

Annual Observances

About Educational Outreach

Share This Page



Get informed. Get involved. Get inspired. Find realistic simulations and memorable, interactive approaches to court basics that include comparing federal and state courts.



Educational Activities

Work with federal judges in their courtrooms or team up with students in classrooms to apply Supreme Court precedents to realistic, teen situations.



Supreme Court Landmarks

Participate in interactive landmark Supreme Court cases that have shaped history and have an impact on law-abiding citizens today.



An innovative U.S. courts program "You Be the Judge" allows students to serve as federal judges in courtrooms to experience what it is like to make difficult sentencing decisions – involving their own peers.

Educational Resources Updates

Subscribe to be notified when we update Educational Resources.

Choose a Justice/Judge

- Time: varies—could incorporate in lecture/discussion or be a separate simulation
- Could utilize US Courts website and resources
 - <http://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/nomination-process>
 - <http://www.fjc.gov/history/home.nsf/page/judges.html>

Jury Simulation

- Uses Frontline's "Inside the Jury Room"
- Group Activity
- Time: about one class period

A red rectangular block containing the word "FRONTLINE" in white, bold, uppercase letters.

FRONTLINE

Supreme Court Mini-Simulation

- Individual or Group Activity
- Time: single- or multi-class period
- Could use case currently on USSC docket
- Could use pre-packaged version from US Courts

The screenshot shows the US Courts website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Email Updates, Court Locator, Careers, News, and a search bar. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links for About Federal Courts, Judges & Judgeships, Services & Forms, Court Records, Statistics & Reports, and Rules & Policies. The main content area is titled "About Federal Courts" and features a sidebar with links to Educational Resources, Supreme Court Landmarks, Annual Observances, and About Educational Outreach. The main content area displays the title "Batson v. Kentucky and J.E.B v. Alabama" and a description: "This Sixth Amendment activity is based on the landmark Supreme Court case Batson v. Kentucky and the landmark Supreme Court case J.E.B. v. Alabama, both dealing with jury selection. Using these resources, present each case and discuss the value of having a diverse jury." Below this is a section titled "About these Resources" with bullet points: "Review facts and case summaries for: Batson v. Kentucky (race and jury selection), J.E.B. v. Alabama (gender and jury selection)" and "Review the discussion questions to check for understanding." There is also a section titled "How to Use These Resources" with the text: "The resources are designed for use in the classroom or courtroom." At the bottom, there is a section titled "In Advance" and a "Share This Page" section with social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, and Pinterest. On the right side, there is a section titled "Activity Download" with a link to "Download Activity Package (PDF, 173.57 KB)" and a section titled "Activity Resources" with links to "Batson v. Kentucky and J.E.B v. Alabama", "Facts and Case Summary - Batson v. Kentucky", "Facts and Case Summary - J.E.B. v. Alabama", and "Discussion Questions - Batson v. Kentucky and J.E.B v. Alabama". At the bottom right, there is a section titled "Related Links" with the text "Learn about jury service."