



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2006 Volume II: The Supreme Court in American Political History

The Powers We Accept: A Brief Unit on the Supreme Court

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This unit seeks to explore the role of the Supreme Court in the political history of the United States through a very brief study of three landmark cases. The goal will be to explore these cases in depth, reading both the opinions and history surrounding those opinions in a way that will illuminate not only the powers of the court but also public reaction to its decisions. In this way, the students will compare the court of Marbury vs. Madison with the court of Bush vs. Gore, evaluate the positions and opinions of the court, and explore in relative depth the case of Dred Scott vs. Sanford. It is the goal of this unit to introduce the court, its history and some of its processes in an extremely concise way.

This unit makes use of a variety of teaching tools to allow students to explore the court in, what I hope is a fair and balanced way. Students will look into the various cases through both primary and secondary sources. They will evaluate the opinions of the court in various situations, as well as writing their own opinion. The unit culminates with a project comparing a modern case (Bush vs. Gore) with earlier cases (Marbury and Dred Scott) to allow students to develop their own perspective on the court from a modern point of view.

(Developed for US History I, grade 10; recommended for US History and Civics, grades 9-12)

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