

An Introduction to North Carolina's Judicial Branch

Overview

In the following activities, students will gain an understanding of the structure of the North Carolina judicial branch. Through activity options such as a poster challenge, a PowerPoint presentation, and a kinesthetic partner activity students will learn about the organization and responsibilities of courts in North Carolina.

Grade

10

Essential Questions

- What is the structure of the NC Judicial branch?
- What types of cases are handled by the courts of the judicial branch?
- Who are the important officials at work within NC judicial branch?

Materials

- NC Judicial Branch Power Point, available in the Database of K-12 Resources:
<https://k12database.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2012/05/NorthCarolinaJudicialBranchPPT.pdf>
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click "View" in the top menu bar of the file, and select "Full Screen Mode"
 - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
- NC Court System Graphic Organizer, attached
- NC Judicial Branch Poster, available in the Database of K-12 Resources or by e-mailing a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
- NC Judicial Branch Poster Challenge & Answer Key, attached
- Help Desk Job Description & Crime Scenarios, activity attached
- Poster paper, markers, scissors, and glue
- NC Court System Web Quest, worksheet and answer key attached
- Create a Want Ad for a NC Judicial Candidate, activity attached
- Sample test questions and answer key, attached

Duration

Varies based on which activities are implemented

Activities

The following are various activity choices for teaching students about North Carolina's Judicial Branch. Teachers should pick and choose which activities best align with their instructional goals.

1. Power Point Introduction to North Carolina's Judicial Branch

Use the NC Judicial Branch Power Point to introduce students to the structure and purpose of NC's Judicial Branch. Students should fill out the attached "NC Court System Graphic Organizer" throughout the presentation and discussion.

2. NC Judicial Branch Poster Challenge

Have students complete the NC Judicial Branch poster challenge (attached) using a print-out of NC Judicial Branch poster, both of which can be accessed in Carolina K-12's Database of K-12 Resources (k12database.unc.edu). Teachers may want to offer a prize for the first team to get all of the correct answers. Review answers when groups have finished.

3. Help Desk Specialist - Help Defendants Find the Correct Court Room!

Place students in groups of two. Give each group a copy of the attached “Help Desk Job Description,” crime scenarios, a piece of poster paper, markers, and a pair of scissors. Tell the students they have been hired by the NC Court system to work at the help desk. One responsibility of being a help desk receptionist is to direct people to which court their case will be heard.

- First, the students will create a poster representing the NC Court System. The poster should include a graphic organizer of the NC Court system (it can be similar to the one from the handout, but encourage students to think of another way to represent the structure) as well as art work to assist poster viewers in learning about North Carolina’s courts.
- Each pair should then cut out the different scenes from the Crime Scenarios handout and glue them to the appropriate court on the NC court graphic organizer they created. Allow students to share their posters and review correct answers.

4. NC Court System Web Quest

Have students complete the “NC Court System Web Quest,” attached

5. Create a Want Ad for a NC Judicial Candidate

Provide students with the attached assignment sheet and instruct students to design a “Want Ad” advertising the skills, background, values, and any other important criteria you think a candidate for the North Carolina Judicial Branch should possess.

6. Sample Test Questions

Additional Activities

- Carolina K-12’s “The Supreme Court of North Carolina”, available in the Database of K-12 Resources or by e-mailing a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu

NC Courts System Organization

Supreme Court

How many Justices?

What Cases:

Court of Appeals

How many judges per courtroom?

How many judges on the Court of Appeals in all?

What Cases:

Superior Court

How many districts and divisions?

What cases:

District Court

What are the four categories?

Is there a jury?

What cases:

Additional notes:

NC Judicial Branch Poster Challenge

Overview

Using the *North Carolina's Judicial Branch* poster and your own background knowledge, work in small groups to find answers to the questions below.

1. What are the names of your group members? _____

2. What are the qualifications to be a juror in North Carolina? _____

3. North Carolina's Court of Appeals is comprised of _____ judges.
4. District Courts in North Carolina hear civil cases involving less than \$_____.
5. Is there anyone in your group who would like to have a job within or connected to the NC judicial system one day? (i.e. lawyer, judge, clerk, police officer, legislator, etc.)? If so, who and why? _____

6. Who appoints magistrates? _____
7. What are the three divisions of North Carolina's General Court of Justice? _____

8. Does the North Carolina Court of Appeals employ a jury? _____
9. What types of family matters do civil courts hear cases about? _____

10. Superior Court judges are elected to ___-year terms, and District Court judges are elected to ___-year terms.
11. Which article of the NC Constitution outlines the judicial power of the state? _____
12. What is the role of North Carolina's Supreme Court? _____

13. What type of offenses would land you in District Court? _____
14. Which of the three types of cases that District Court hears is the most common? _____
15. Clerks of Court are elected to ___-year terms and are elected at the _____ level.
16. Why should you be aware of the functions of the NC Judicial Branch? Why is this important to study? _____

**Judicial Branch Poster Challenge:
Answer Key**

1. What are the names of your group members? Answers will vary.
2. What are the qualifications to be a juror in North Carolina? citizen of the state and resident of the county; 18 years old or older; able to speak and understand English; physically and mentally competent; and have no felony conviction.
3. North Carolina's Court of Appeals is comprised of 15 judges.
4. District Courts in North Carolina hear civil cases involving less than \$10,000
5. Is there anyone in your group who would like to have a job within or connected to the NC judicial system one day? Answers will vary.
6. Who appoints magistrates? the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge
7. What are the three divisions of North Carolina's General Court of Justice? Appellate Division, Superior Court Division, and District Court Division
8. Does the North Carolina Court of Appeals employ a jury? no
9. What types of family matters do civil courts hear cases about? divorce, custody, child support, adoption, and domestic violence
10. Superior Court judges are elected to 8-year terms, and District Court judges are elected to 4- year terms.
11. Which article of the NC Constitution outlines the judicial power of the state? VI (Article 4)
12. What is the role of North Carolina's Supreme Court? to determine legal error or interpretation of the law
13. What type of offenses would land you in District Court? Answers will vary between civil, criminal, and juvenile examples
14. Which of the three types of cases that District Court hears is the most common? criminal cases
15. Clerks of Court are elected to 4-year terms and are elected at the county level.
16. Why should you be aware of the functions of the NC Judicial Branch? Why is this important to study? Answers will vary.

Help Desk Specialist Job Description

Welcome to the NC Judicial Branch! As a help desk specialist, one of your responsibilities will be assisting defendants locate the correct court room. Below is a list of lost defendants. Your responsibility is to create a map of the organization of the NC Court System on the poster paper and help each defendant find where they are going by gluing their description in the appropriate spot.

Responsibilities:

- ✓ Create a poster of the NC Judicial Branch that includes the District Court, the Superior Court, the Court of Appeals, and the Supreme Court
- ✓ Cut out the stories from below and glue them to the appropriate court on the poster

Do not dally! These poor folks will be held in contempt of court if you can't help them quick...

| |
|--|
| Jerry Blank appeals her sentence of the death penalty for the murder of a bicyclist. |
| Bob Bell was issued a speeding ticket for going ten miles over the speed limit. |
| Kim Blackburn was arrested for stealing a Cadillac Escalade. |
| Bill Brady is suing NC because he goes to a terrible high school based on his right for a public education. |
| Tammy Bullock was arrested for stealing a stop sign. |
| Tim Braddock is being charged with armed robbery. |
| Maria Cooper is appealing her sentence of 2000 community service hours for distributing illegal substances. |
| Anthony Deltoro was arrested for possessing a small amount of marijuana (under a ¼ ounce). |
| Brandon Donahue was given a ticket for jaywalking, but he plans to plead not guilty. |
| Lisa Fleming was arrested for driving without a valid driver's license. |
| Eddie Flowers is appealing his sentence of 6 months in prison for pirating DVDs. |
| George Fowler was involuntarily committed into a mental health hospital by his stepdaughter, Lula Fowler. |
| Bernard Guido was arrested for public intoxication. Guido is 16 years old. |
| Jim Holt is suing his ex-girlfriend, Susie Lillington, for the amount of \$50,000 in graduate school tuition that he loaned her. |
| An unnamed public official was given a misdemeanor ticket for unsafe hunting practice after an accidental shooting. |
| Barbara Hall is accused of contributing to the delinquency of a minor because she bought beer for her teenager's party. |

| |
|---|
| Tiawana Laurence is appealing her guilty verdict for a hit and run accident involving her Pontiac and a neighbor's front porch. |
| Audrey Lewis is suing her local government for hindering her right to religious liberty. |
| Robert Hill was arrested for misdemeanor publicly indecency when he tried to start a streak after a frat party. |
| Billy McCain, aka Mr. Pink, was accused of stealing \$100,000 dollars in diamonds from a jewelry dealer. |
| Reginald Keller was accused of giving fictitious information to a police officer. |
| Robbie Glad is suing Jeremy Allen for a breach of contract for \$500. |
| Bill Bradley is filing for divorce from his wife, Henrietta Bradley. |
| Sterling Roberts was arrested for misdemeanor destruction of public property and noise violations late Saturday evening after the crushing defeat of Duke by Number 1 ranked UNC Chapel Hill. |
| Andy Dufrain is appealing his conviction for the murder of his wife, Renee. The conviction was already upheld in a Court of Appeals. |
| Javier Rodriguez was found with 500 pounds of marijuana in his residence in Zebulon, NC. |
| Robert Wakefield is arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol. He blew a .20 blood alcohol level. |
| Anton Chigurh is requesting a new trial with a jury after being found guilty for carrying a concealed weapon without a permit in a district court. |
| Matt Liles is appealing his recent disbaring from the NC State Bar. |

Name: _____

NC Court System - Web Quest

Directions: Use your own knowledge and the information found at <http://www.nccourts.org> to complete the following questions.

1. What is the highest court in North Carolina? _____
How many justices sit on a panel in this court? _____

2. District Courts are also called what kind of courts in North Carolina? _____
What are the four categories that district courts are divided into? _____

3. In which court would the following situation be heard: District, Superior, or Supreme?

a. Sarah, a 14-year-old, is accused of being delinquent. _____

b. Will has committed arson, which is a felony in North Carolina. _____

c. Harry is going to appeal his death penalty sentence. _____

d. Molly and Justin have been married for five years and want to get a divorce. _____

4. What two courts make up the Appellate division of the NC Court System? _____
What is the main purpose of the Appellate division? _____

5. How many cases does the trial division of the NC Court System handle each year? _____
Which courts are a part of the trial division? _____

6. You are angry because John Johnson has borrowed \$3,400 from you and hasn't paid you back.
a. Where should you file a law suit against him and who will hear the case?

b. What if John Johnson owed you \$8,000? _____

7. You have just been found guilty of a crime but know you are innocent! What can you do about the judge's wrong decision?

8. What are three duties of a magistrate, who is a judicial officer of the District Court?

9. What are the eligibility requirements to serve on a jury for jury duty in North Carolina?

10. Who is the chief justice on the NC Supreme Court?_____

11. Your friend Tonya is schedule to be in criminal court next week, but she doesn't want to go. What could happen to her if she decides not to show up?

**NC Court System Web Quest
ANSWER KEY**

1. What is the highest court in North Carolina? **The Supreme Court of North Carolina** How many justices sit on a panel in this court? **a chief justice and six associate justices**
2. District Courts are also called what kind of courts in North Carolina? **Trial courts**
What are the four categories that district courts are divided into? **civil, criminal, juvenile and magistrate**
3. In which court would the following situation be heard: District, Superior, or Supreme?
 - a. Sarah, a 14-year-old, is accused of being delinquent. **District**
 - b. Will has committed arson, which is a felony in North Carolina. **Superior**
 - c. Harry is going to appeal his death penalty sentence. **Supreme**
 - d. Molly and Justin have been married for five years and want to get a divorce. **District**
4. What two courts make up the Appellate division of the NC Court System?
Supreme Court and Court of Appeals
What is the main purpose of the Appellate division? **The Supreme Court and Court of Appeals review trial court decisions in which a party claims the judge made an error applying the law.**
5. How many cases does the trial division of the NC Court System handle each year? **3.2 million cases**
Which courts are a part of the trial division? **The Superior and District courts**
6. You are angry because John Johnson has borrowed \$3400 from you and hasn't paid you back.
 - a. Where should you file a law suit against him and who will hear the case? **Disputes up to \$5000 can be brought in small claims court, which is a division of the District Court. These cases are heard by magistrates.**
 - b. What if John Johnson owed you \$8,000? **Disputes up to \$10,000 can be filed in District Court. These cases are tried before a District Court Judge or jury, but may be first sent to arbitration.**
7. You have just been found guilty of a crime but know you are innocent! What can you do about the judge's wrong decision? **You can appeal the decision of the judge or jury. For small claims cases, the appeal is to District Court. For most other cases, the appeal is to the North Carolina Court of Appeals.**
8. What are three duties of a magistrate, who is a judicial officer of the District Court?
 - a. **In criminal cases, a magistrate issues warrants and sets bail.**
 - b. **A magistrate may accept guilty pleas and payments of fines and costs for traffic violations and minor misdemeanors and, in some counties, may conduct trials in certain worthless check cases.**
 - c. **In civil cases, the magistrate presides over small claims court.**
9. What are the eligibility requirements to serve on a jury for jury duty in North Carolina? **To be eligible to serve as a juror in North Carolina, a person must be a citizen of the state and a resident of the county, and have not served as a juror in the past two years. Jurors must be 18 years of age, or older, and there is no maximum age limit. They must be mentally and physically competent, be able to understand English, and not have been convicted of a felony, unless their citizenship rights have been restored.**
10. Who is the chief justice on the NC Supreme Court? **Sarah Parker**
11. Your friend Tonya is schedule to be in criminal court next week, but she doesn't want to go. What could happen to her if she decides not to show up? **If you do not go to court on the date that you are supposed to, then an Order for Arrest may be issued on that day. If you miss court, then go to the Clerk's Office immediately and explain the situation. You may be assigned another**

court date or you may not. Asking for a new court date does not mean that you will get it. It is your responsibility to arrive at court on your court date and to arrive at court on time. You should also be aware that your failure to appear in court might result in the revocation of your drivers license.

Create a “Want Ad” for a NC Judicial Candidate

Your Assigned Court Level: _____
(either Supreme, Appeals, Superior, or District)

What qualities do you think that the ideal judge should have? Do you think they should have a degree from Harvard law? Does it matter if they are a native North Carolinian? Are there particular experiences he/she should have? Should they encompass particular personality traits, values, or views? This is your chance to advertise on the *Craigslist* “Jobs” section to recruit judges to run for a particular level of the NC Judicial Branch.

Design a “Want Ad” advertising the skills, background, values, and any other important criteria you think a candidate for the North Carolina Judicial Branch should possess. Make sure to include the qualifications you are seeking in these categories:

- ✓ Background information (university attended, degree, previous experience, etc.)
- ✓ Personal information (family, place of residence, hobbies, etc.)
- ✓ Moral and ethical principles
- ✓ Skills related to the judicial process
- ✓ Particular judicial beliefs/political stances (i.e., stance on right to life, death penalty, gun laws, etc.)
- ✓ Other particular qualifications your group feels is important in finding the best candidate

Use the following posting from Craigslist as a format for writing your “Wanted Ad.” Your final product should be more detailed, containing at least 8 sentences of description.

[raleigh craigslist](#) > [legal jobs](#)

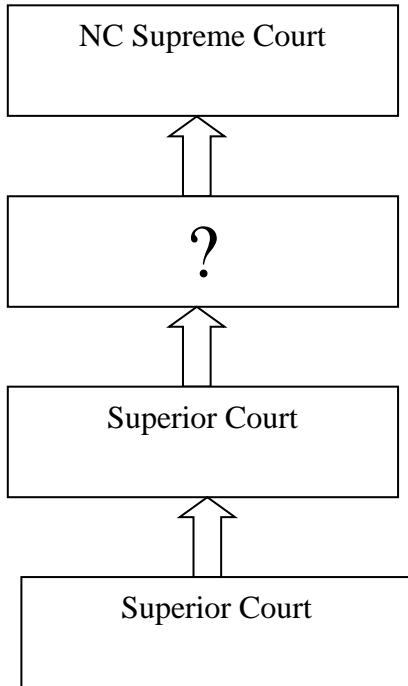
Paralegal (Downtown Raleigh)

Reply to:

Date:

Paralegal/legal assistant needed in mid-sized downtown Raleigh law firm to assist attorneys with busy and rewarding adoption/family law practice. Ideal candidate has good work ethic, detail oriented and superior organizational skills. MS Word experience required. Benefits include health, life, 401(k) and parking.

1. **The Structure of NC Courts**



Which court correctly completes the graphic above?

- A) Magistrate
- B) US Supreme Court
- C) International Criminal Court
- D) Court of Appeals

2. Which court would the trial for armed robbery most likely occur?

- A) Magistrate
- B) District
- C) Superior
- D) Supreme

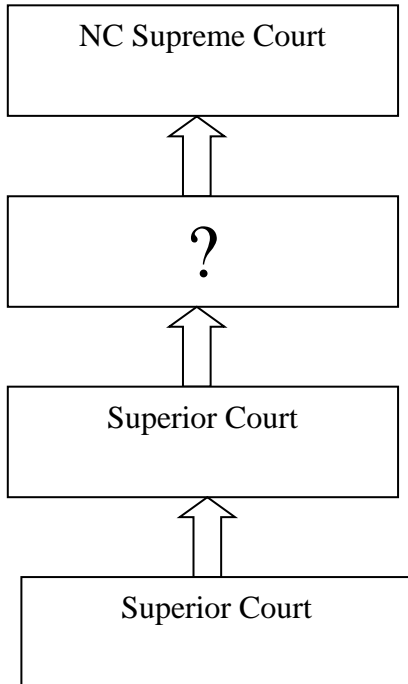
3. Which best explains the role of juries in North Carolina appeals courts?

- A) Juries decide the defendant's innocence or guilt
- B) Juries decide sentencing for defendants found guilty by a judge
- C) Juries review the decisions made by judges to ensure fairness
- D) North Carolina appeals courts do not have juries

4. Which North Carolina court would hear the appeal of a defendant sentenced to the death penalty?

- A) District
- B) Superior
- C) Court of Appeals
- D) Supreme

1. **The Structure of NC Courts**



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