

# The Judicial Branch

## TOPIC SUMMARY

The American judicial system interprets and applies our country's laws. There are three levels of federal courts—district courts, appeals courts, and the United States Supreme Court. Federal courts have jurisdiction over certain aspects of federal law, such as constitutional rights, disputes with foreign governments, and disputes between states. The Supreme Court's decisions have wide-ranging effects because the justices interpret the meaning of the Constitution. Each year the Supreme Court receives applications to hear more than 7,000 cases, but it generally elects to hear only about 200 of those. All cases accepted to the Supreme Court docket go through a series of steps: written arguments, oral arguments, conference, opinion writing, and the announcement of the decision.

**FOLDABLES™**  
**Study Organizer**

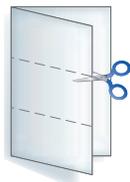
**Sequencing Information Study Foldable** *This Foldable will help students analyze and sequence key influences and responsibilities of the judicial branch of government.*

**Step 1** Fold a sheet of paper in half the long way with edges evenly together.



**Step 2** Turn the paper and fold it into thirds.

**Step 3** Unfold and cut along the two folds on the front flap to make three tabs.



**Step 4** Label as shown, including arrows.



**Reading and Writing**  
*Compare and note the details of the responsibilities of each level of the court system from least influence to greatest influence.*

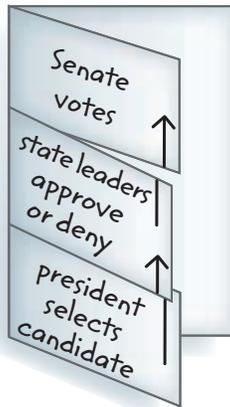
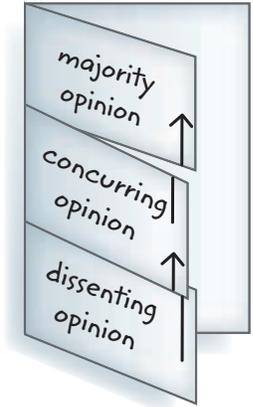
## TOPIC ACTIVITY IDEAS

### Researching

Have students create the Study Foldable above, labeling the tabs as shown and have them write details about each court on the tabs. Then have student groups choose and research one recent case heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. Students should identify the subject of the case and note the progression of the case from the start until it reaches the Supreme Court. Group members should note where their case originated, why it was accepted for appeal to the high court, and the decision in each case. Discuss with students why each case was important for federal review, and analyze the impact that each decision has had or may yet have on federal law.

## DIFFERENTIATING

Remind students that U.S. Supreme Court opinions explore the pertinent issues raised in federal court cases. Have students use the Foldable to explain the differences between dissenting, concurring, and majority opinions. Lead a class discussion to explore why justices may wish to clarify their individual opinions on the cases heard. You may also wish to discuss with students the reasons that these opinions could be important to subsequent court cases.



## SEQUENCING

Have students use the Foldable to trace the process of federal judge selection. Students should note that the process of selection is repeated if the candidate is not approved by Senate. Remind students that this practice applies to the selection of judges for district and trial courts as well. Discuss with the class the way in which the process differs from the selection of Supreme Court justices.

### Student Study Tip

Have students reserve a section in their notes for historic legal actions. Notable actions may include important court cases, such as *Marbury v. Madison*, or the passage of key constitutional amendments. Encourage students to record a short description of each notable action and to explain why each action is important.