

The Separation of Powers and an Independent Judiciary – Why Do They Matter to You?
50-minute Program for Distance Learning

Program summary: Students meet and work with a judge to apply what they’ve learned in school about the separation of powers to the concept of an independent judiciary.

Program goals:

1. Develop an understanding of how an independent judiciary is crucial to the separation of powers.
2. Understand why it matters to the students.
3. Practice oral communication skills.
4. Meet and learn from a federal judge.

Time	Activity
10 mins.	<p>Welcome!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief introduction from judge (name, title, location of your courthouse, and the topic of today’s program) • Brief introduction from student ambassador (selected student introduces him/herself and teacher, class, school, grade, and location of school) • Judge encourages student participation during the program and explains ways to alert the judge of desired participation: raise hand, raise virtual hand in Zoom, (possibly write comment/question in chat box which is locked to prevent private chats but allows entire group chat). • Let’s practice! Judge asks students to raise a hand if they would respond yes to a question (questions can include: who tends to help friends or family resolve a fight?, who likes to write?, who enjoys reading?, who is a good listener? . . . characteristics of a judge)
10 mins.	<p>What does “the separation of powers” mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does “the separation of powers” mean? How does our country separate powers? • U.S. Courts video: The Separation of Powers • What are some key words, ideas, or descriptions of the separation of powers that caught your attention? • Why is the separation of powers so important?
10 mins.	<p>What is an independent (or impartial) judiciary?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does “impartial” mean? • Let’s see what judicial independence means to these judges. U.S. Court video: An Impartial Federal Judiciary • What are some key words, ideas, or descriptions of an independent, impartial judiciary that caught your attention? • What happens when the judiciary is not impartial or independent?

5 mins.	<p>How do the concepts of “the separation of powers” and “independent judiciary” fit together?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think? • Ask the judge what he or she thinks!
10 mins.	<p>The separation of powers in action in the courts!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free speech & expression: <i>United States v. Eichman</i> • Due process: <i>Johnson v. United States</i> • How do these cases illustrate the separation of powers and an impartial judiciary? • What cases have you learned about in school that illustrate the separation of powers?
5 mins.	<p>Final Q&A with Judge</p>