

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Obama Nominates Sotomayor to High Court, 05/26/2009

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/jan-june09/scotus_05-26.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.]

INITIATING QUESTIONS

What are the three branches of government?

What does the Supreme Court do?

How do Supreme Court decisions affect the lives of ordinary Americans?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. Who is Sonia Sotomayor?

ANSWER

President Barack Obama nominated Judge Sonia Sotomayor of New York to the U.S. Supreme Court.

2. Why is her nomination historic?

ANSWER

If confirmed, Sotomayor would be the third female justice and the first person of Hispanic descent to sit on the High Court.

3. Would Sotomayor make the Supreme Court more liberal or conservative?

ANSWER

Sotomayor would not alter the ideological balance of the court, since she would replace Justice David Souter, who generally sides with the liberals on key 5-4 rulings.

But at 54, she would be one of the younger judges and her writings suggest that she would provide a sharp counterpoint to some of the outspoken conservative judges.

4. What kind of nominee did President Obama want to select?

ANSWER

Upon announcing his pick, President Obama said that a justice should know "how the world works, and how ordinary people live."

Earlier, the president said he wanted someone who is empathetic to the lives of everyday Americans because he believes that it is important for justices to be able to identify with the people whose lives they could change with their rulings.

5. What is judicial activism?

ANSWER

A term used to describe judges who make rulings that change legislation based on their own personal political beliefs.

6. How does someone become a Supreme Court Justice?

ANSWER

All nominees to the Supreme Court must be questioned by a Senate Committee and confirmed by a Senate vote.

7. How many Supreme Court nominations have been rejected?

ANSWER

According to the Senate historian's office, 28 of 158 nominations have been rejected, withdrawn or simply not acted upon since the court was founded in 1789.

Most recently, President George Bush's 2005 nominee, Harriet Miers, withdrew after fierce opposition from conservatives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. What qualities do you think are important for a Supreme Court justice to have?

2. President Obama said that he wanted to nominate someone who is empathetic to the lives of everyday Americans. Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

3. If confirmed, Sotomayor would be the first person of Hispanic descent and the third woman to sit on the Supreme Court. Do you believe it is important to have a diverse Supreme Court? Why?

4. Use this lesson plan to explore how the Supreme Court affects your life:

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/history/scotus_function.html

and these lesson plans to look at the confirmation process

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/socialstudies/confirm2_7-20.html

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.