

# LESSON 3

Grade Level & Subject: High School Social Studies (History or Government)

Unit: Discovering the Rich History of the Michigan Supreme Court

Lesson: The “Big Four” of the Michigan Supreme Court

## State Standards and Benchmarks:

Social Studies. Strand I. Historical Perspective. Standard I.2 Comprehending the Past. All students will understand narratives about major eras of American and world history by identifying the people involved, describing the setting, and sequencing the events. Standard I.3 Analyzing and Interpreting the Past. All students will reconstruct the past by comparing interpretations written by others from a variety of perspectives and creating narratives from evidence. Strand V. Inquiry. Standard V.2 Conducting Investigations. All students will conduct investigations by formulating a clear statement of a question, gathering and organizing information from a variety of sources, analyzing and interpreting information, formulating and testing hypotheses, reporting results both orally and in writing, and making use of appropriate technology.

## Unit Outcome:

When this unit is finished, students will be able to: (1) conduct historical research/investigation using both primary and secondary sources, (2) describe the importance of the Michigan Supreme Court, (3) present, verbally and in written form, informed opinions about Court decisions and procedures, and (4) recognize how the Michigan Supreme Court affects their lives.

## Lesson Outcomes:

Students will be able to

- Identify the Justices known as “The Big Four”
- Relate on some level to the lives of these four justices
- Participate in a simple activity involving investigation and presentation skills

## Rationale/Purpose for Lesson:

This lesson will expose students to four justices who are considered to be an important part of the history of the Michigan Supreme Court. Knowing something about these justices and their service to the Court will enhance student understanding of the history of the Court. Students will use basic research methods to gather information about the justices and will be required to present their findings. Public speaking is a skill that all students need to learn and having to present publicly should make them feel more accountable for the

research they will conduct; they will have to be confident about the information they find.

Resources/Materials required:

- Overhead of the Cooley Law Center's outdoor copy of the "Big Four" portrait
- Donald Winter's essay, "The Big Four."
- "A Brief History of the Michigan Supreme Court"
- Copies: "The Big Four" essay by Donald Winters.
- Copies: Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide pages 3, 64-65, and 68-73

Introduction:

Tell students to take out a pen and a sheet of paper. Tell them that for the next two minutes they are to write down as much as they can about the idea of "one Court of justice." At the end of that time, ask for a couple of volunteers to share their answers. When this brief activity is completed, ask students if they remember names of influential Michigan Supreme Court justices. Tell them that the focus of the day will be on the "Big Four" and their contributions to the Court.

Procedures:

1. Deliver mini-lecture about the "Big Four"
2. Break students into eight cooperative learning groups
3. Tell each group to assign a reporter and a main speaker
4. Choose one person from each group to serve as captain
5. Gather the captains at the front of the room and tell them that it will be their jobs to maintain order, to ensure the participation of every group member, and to make sure that the presentation is satisfactory or better. Then tell the captains that they will be responsible for the grade that each of their team members receive
6. Assign two groups to each justice and number the groups so that 1-4 will cover the complete "Big Four" and 5-8 will do the same
7. Tell groups 1-4 that they are to prepare a brief presentation about their justice based on information contained in "The Big Four" essay. Tell groups 5-8 that they are to prepare a presentation based on the information from "A Brief History of the Michigan Supreme Court" and from the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Reference Guide
8. Tell them to include information about the justices' backgrounds, families, upbringings, educations, service to the Court, etc.
9. Give them 15-20 minutes to prepare a 1-2 minute presentation
10. Once the preparation time has passed, randomly choose groups to deliver their presentations

11. As time permits, students should be allowed to ask questions of the other groups or of the teacher.

Closure:

Briefly recap what was covered in the presentations. Highlight the important facts about the “Big Four” so that students leave with a solid understanding of who these justices were. Stress that the Michigan Supreme Court justices known as the “Big Four” may have lived a long time ago, but they were people too and they were once teenagers too, full of hopes, dreams and ideals.

Guided study/Homework

Research Michigan Supreme Court justices on the Internet and choose one you find interesting. Write a one-page paper that tells something significant about that person’s service to the Court. This paper should not be a summary of the information you find. Instead, you should briefly summarize something about that justice’s service to the Court and then explain the significance or potential significance of this information. It is not necessary to have more than one source. (*Depending on the normal workload carried by students and depending upon the ease of Internet access, this assignment can be due on either Day 4 or Day 5*).

Assessment:

1. Students will turn in what they wrote about “One Court of Justice.” This writing will earn students credit for having completed it. The teacher should be looking to see if students understand this concept, which is integral to a full understanding of the Michigan Supreme Court today.
2. Students will be graded for their participation and performance in the presentations. As stated above, the group members will all receive the same grade and the captain is ultimately responsible for this grade. Students will be expected to demonstrate strong basic research skills. It is expected that all students will participate in this activity. Teacher monitoring of the planning process will help to ensure this participation.

Evaluation and Reflection: (To be completed by teacher after lesson has been implemented)

## LESSON 3

Grade Level & Subject: High School Social Studies (History or Government)

Unit: Discovering the Rich History of the Michigan Supreme Court

Lesson: The “Big Four” of the Michigan Supreme Court

1. Write for two minutes about the concept of “One Court of Justice.”
2. Participate in a group activity and create a presentation about one of the “Big Four” justices of the Michigan Supreme Court.
3. Pay careful attention to the other groups’ presentations and take notes.
4. **Homework:** Research Michigan Supreme Court justices on the Internet and choose one you find interesting. Write a one-page paper that tells something significant about that person’s service to the Court. This paper should not be a summary of the information you find. Instead, you should briefly summarize something about that justice’s service to the Court and then explain the significance or potential significance of this information. It is not necessary to have more than one source.

If you missed class, you should also:

1. Get a copy of the lecture notes
2. Get a copy of Donald Winter’s essay, “The Big Four” and write a 1-page summary of the information contained therein.