

Learning Plan: The Pennsylvania Court System

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Subject: American Government and Economics

Grade level: 12

Standards:

5.1.12.A: Analyze the sources, purposes, functions of law, and how the rule of law protects individual rights and promotes the common good.

5.1.12.D: Evaluate state and federal powers based on significant documents and other critical sources.

Essential Question:

Does the structure of the Pennsylvania court system provide efficiency in the application of our laws?

Guiding Questions:

What clues can be used when evaluating unfamiliar concepts?

What is the structure of our state court system?

What are the major functions of each level of our court system?

What process does a case follow when moving through the court system?

How does one determine the efficiency of a system or process?

Performance Objectives:

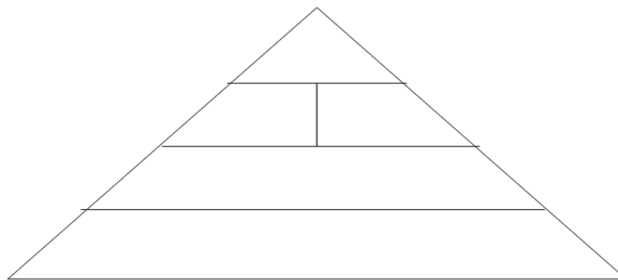
Students will:

- Understand the structure of the Pennsylvania court system
- Identify the major functions of each level of the Pennsylvania court system
- Track sample cases as they move through the court system
- Evaluate the efficiency of the Pennsylvania court system

Student Activities:

Opener: Have students draw and complete the following diagram detailing the structure of our PA court system (to be displayed on overhead or SMART board as students enter the room). Encourage students to use word clues to determine level placement. Monitor student progress as they are working.

The Pennsylvania State Judicial System



- A. Commonwealth Court B. Superior Court
C. Court of Common Pleas D. Supreme Court
E. Minor Courts (District Magistrates, etc.)

Activity 1: The Structure of the PA Court System

As a class, review the correct placement of the levels on the diagram by having students place them or write them on the board, building the pyramid from the bottom up. Be sure to ask students to share what word clues they used or prior knowledge they had to decide how to correctly place the levels.

Activity 2: The Functions of the PA Court System

Distribute the attached graphic organizer and separate students into groups of five, assigning each student in the group a particular level of the pyramid. Have students list the major functions of his or her level before reporting back to the group. Students will then “teach” the level they have researched to the other 4 students in the group until the organizer is complete. Monitor progress and review as a class if necessary.

Students should use the following website as a resource: www.aopc.org

Activity 3: Cases in the Court System

Review the attached scenarios with students and discuss and clarify student questions. Ask students to predict what path the case will follow as it moves through the court system using the format listed. Discuss student answers and possible alternatives.

Closure:

Ask students to respond to the following prompt using complete sentences:

Write a paragraph or two explaining why you do or do not feel that our court system works efficiently to uphold our laws. Be sure to use examples from the cases we reviewed and be prepared to share and submit your answer during the next class period (or same period).

Learning style accommodations:

CS/Mastery: Graphic organizer for note-taking, clear directions, review as a class for accuracy

CR/Self Expressive: using word clues/prior knowledge to guess placement of levels, predicting the different pathways a case may follow

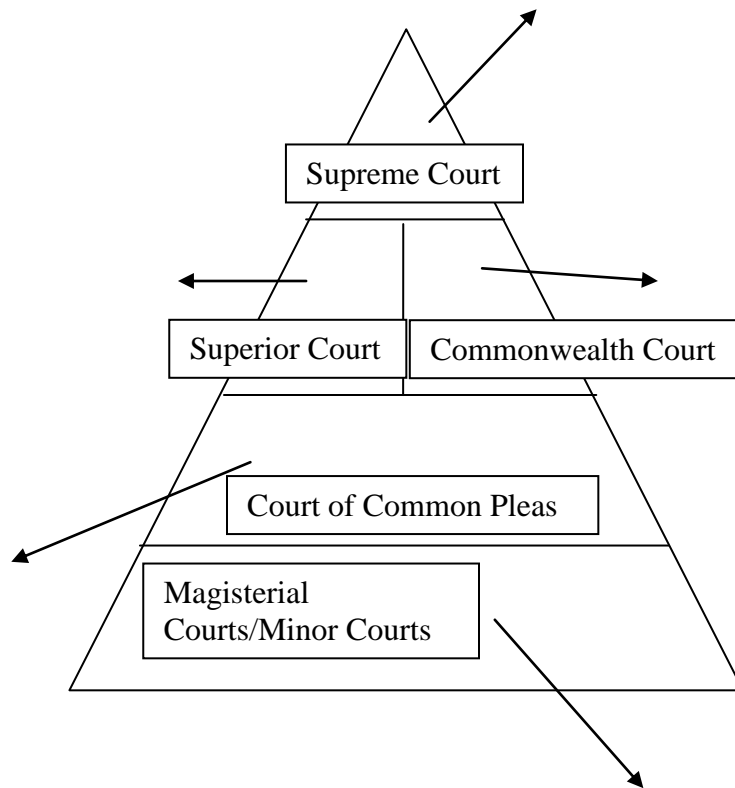
AR/Interpersonal: Group work and teaching fellow classmates, human drama of case studies, review as a class and receive teacher feedback

AS/Understanding: structure of pyramid and logical order of case flow, research prior to group work, analysis of the court system’s efficiency

Student Handout: The Functions of the Pennsylvania Court System

Name: _____

Use the following graphic organizer to outline the functions of the Pennsylvania court system. You will be responsible for researching the main functions of ONE of the levels, which has been assigned to you. The following website will be helpful as your research: www.aopc.org



Once you have finished your research, you will work with your group members to teach each other about each of the other levels.

*Remember: this does not mean you should simply allow others to copy what you have written—put the information in your own words and find a way to help your group members understand it!

Student Handout: Cases in the Pennsylvania Court System

Name: _____

Read each scenario below and respond to the questions/prompts that follow. Use another sheet of paper if you require more space. Be sure to use complete sentences.

Scenario 1: The police have arrested a suspect who is accused of setting fire to two buildings on the outskirts of town. He has been charged with two counts of arson and prosecutors have substantial evidence against him. He has entered a plea of “not guilty.”

1. What court has original jurisdiction over his case (i.e. which court will most likely hear his case first)?
2. Is this a criminal or civil trial?
3. What are the possible outcomes of his case once it has been heard at the first level?
4. If he should be found guilty, what options does he have if he maintains that he is not guilty?
5. Who will most likely have the “final say” in his case?

Scenario 2: A case has been heard and decided in the Court of Common Pleas regarding custody of two minor children. One of the parties is unhappy with the decision and wishes to appeal.

1. Does the losing party have the option to appeal?
2. If yes, what court will hear the case once the appeal has been filed?
3. Who will most likely have the “final say” in his case?

Scenario 3: Mrs. Davis has filed a complaint against the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PENNDOT) for damage done to her driveway during road repairs.

1. What court has original jurisdiction over her case (i.e. which court will most likely hear his case first)?
2. Is this a criminal or civil trial?
3. What are the possible outcomes of his case once it has been heard at the first level?
4. Who will most likely have the “final say” in his case?