



The Legal System: SS.7.CG.3.9
State & Federal Courts
VIDEO VIEWING GUIDE #1



State Courts

1. ‘We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice...’
2. Benjamin Franklin once said that “it is better [to allow] 100 guilty Persons [to] escape than [to let] one innocent Person suffer.” Our own Preamble to the US Constitution declares that one of the most important purposes of government is to establish justice.
3. It is through court systems that this constitutional objective is achieved. How is our court system structured and how does it work?
4. In this video we will learn about the levels, functions, and powers of the courts at the state level.
5. Some things you will be able to do after watching this video:
 - ✓ You will be able to tell the difference between the levels, functions, and powers of courts at the state level.
6. So let’s talk about the courts. It’s important to remember that not every court can or will hear every case. Different courts have different jurisdictions, or authority to hear a case.
7. The Florida Constitution decides jurisdiction for its own courts. Let’s begin taking a look at how Florida’s court system is structured.
8. **THE STATE COURT SYSTEM**
Most court cases in a state are dealt with by the state court system. In Florida there is a four level court system. Let’s work our way through each of the levels.
9. **Level 1, COUNTY COURTS**
Each Florida county has a county level court. County Courts handle misdemeanors, which usually have less consequences than major crimes.
10. If your parents break a traffic law, receive a ticket by a police officer and want to fight the ticket in court, they may have to go to the county court. If your older brother or sister throws a party and disturbs the peace, they may have to go to the county court to fight the charge. If there is a property damage case, or a lawsuit for damages under 15,000 dollars, a county court will hear the case.

11. You also have other kinds of courts. Traffic courts, juvenile courts (which deal with people under the age of 18), and small claims courts.

12. In small claims courts there are two sides: plaintiffs (people filing lawsuits) and defendants (people being sued).

13. Level 2, CIRCUIT COURTS

Felonies, which are more serious crimes like murder, armed robbery, and drug cases and civil cases that are 15,000 dollars or more are heard at the next level of the court system, known as the circuit courts.

14. These trials may be held before a jury, a group of citizens sworn to give a true verdict according to the evidence heard in a case.

15. As in other levels of the court system, it is the job of the judge, the public official who decides questions brought before the court, to make sure the trial is handled fairly and lawfully.

16. Level 3, DISTRICT COURT OF APPEALS

The District Court of Appeals is the third highest level of courts in Florida. There are five district courts in Florida, and they do not hold any trials or have juries. Instead, these are appellate courts, which reviews decisions made by the lower trial courts. A panel of judges decides cases by a majority vote.

17. Level 4, THE FLORIDA SUPREME COURT The highest court in the state is the Florida Supreme Court. It supervises all the courts in Florida and can review the decisions of the appellate courts. It currently has seven justices, and they make the final decision on cases brought before them, but their decision can be appealed to the United States Supreme Court.

18. Remember, though, that the Florida Supreme Court only deals with cases from Florida. It does not address federal matters or the U.S. Constitution).

19. The US Constitution has supremacy over all state laws if there is a conflict between federal law and state law.

20. Let's Check In

Question 1: What are the 4 levels of the court system in Florida?

21. ANSWER TO QUESTION

22. Question 2: If you want to sue someone for 10,000 dollars, at what level of the Florida court system would you bring your case?

23. ANSWER TO QUESTION

24. Question 3: Explain why a plaintiff or defendant cannot win a trial within a District Court of Appeal.

25. ANSWER TO QUESTION