



The Legal System: SS.7.CG.3.9
State & Federal Courts
VIDEO #2 SCRIPT



Federal Courts

1. So we know about the levels, functions, and powers of the state court system here in Florida, let's now turn our attention to the federal court system!

2. The Federal Court System

3. In this video we will learn about the levels, functions, and powers of the courts at the federal level.

4. 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 federal level.
- ✓ You will be able to recognize that the jurisdiction of the federal courts is derived from the US Constitution.

5. Article III of the US Constitution outlines the federal court system. Article III gives Congress the power to establish courts below the US Supreme Court.

6. Federal courts hear cases involving the federal government or the US Constitution. There are three levels of federal courts in the United States: District Courts, Appeals Courts, and the United States Supreme Court. Let's start our discussion with District Courts.

7. United States District Courts

There are 94 federal judicial districts, with at least one in each state and district courts in the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Three US territories (Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the US Virgin Islands), also have federal district courts. These courts have original jurisdiction, which means that certain cases must begin there. US District courts decide on the facts of a federal case, and are the trial courts for both civil and criminal cases at the federal level.

8. These are the only federal courts where witnesses testify and juries make decisions about the case. So what happens if you lose your case in a US District Court? Well, it then can be appealed to the next level, the United States Court of Appeals.

9. United States Court of Appeals

There are 12 regional US Court of Appeals. These courts review the decisions made in a lower district court. Appeals courts have appellate jurisdiction, which means they can review decisions from the lower courts if the people or groups involved believe the lower court made an unfair decision.

10. Appeals can occur if

1. the lower court judge applied the law incorrectly
2. the lower court judge used the wrong procedures
3. new evidence turns up, or
4. a citizen's rights were violated

11. The United States Supreme Court

The highest federal court established by the United States Constitution is the US Supreme Court. The US Supreme Court usually consists of a Chief Justice and 8 Associate Justices, and these justices hear cases that may come out of either state or federal courts. They choose which cases to hear, and the cases usually involve a question about the US Constitution or federal law.

12. So what kind of cases will federal courts hear? Well, this is based on jurisdiction. Article III of the US Constitution gives the federal courts jurisdiction to hear eight kinds of cases:

1. Cases involving the US Constitution (these are cases where a person believes that a constitutional right has been violated)
2. Violations of federal law (these are cases where the government accuses a person of a federal crime)
3. Conflict between states (these are cases where state governments have disagreements)
4. Disputes between people in different states (these are cases where citizens in different states have disagreements)
5. Lawsuits involving the federal government (these are cases where the federal government sues or is sued by an individual or company)
6. Cases involving foreign governments and treaties (these are cases where there is a dispute between the federal government or private citizens and a foreign government)
7. Cases based on admiralty and maritime laws (these are cases that concern accidents or crimes on the oceans or seas)
8. Cases involving US diplomats (these cases concern a US diplomat working in a US embassy in another country)

13. Don't forget too that the federal courts have appellate jurisdiction, which means cases can be appealed to them.

14. Well, we certainly have a complex and deep court system at both the state and the federal level! Before we take a look at where these courts get their powers and jurisdictions, let's check in.

15. Question One. What are the 3 levels of the federal court system?

16. ANSWER TO QUESTION

17. Question Two. Your friend tells you that she just found out her case will be heard by the US Supreme Court! What kind of question would your friend's case involve?

18. ANSWER TO QUESTION

19. Question Three. Why can't a jury ever find anyone guilty of a crime within a US Court of Appeals?

20. ANSWER TO QUESTION