



## Newsletter for English Teachers About the USA – Virtual Classroom

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### U.S. Government: The United States Supreme Court

[The Supreme Court](#), the highest court in the U.S., examines federal and state statutes and executive actions to determine whether they conform to the U.S. Constitution.

On April 9, 2010 [Justice John Paul Stevens](#) announced that he would retire after nearly 35 years on the bench of the U.S. Supreme Court. President Obama announced the nomination of [Solicitor General Elena Kagan](#) to replace Stevens on May 10, 2010. This is President Obama's second nomination to the nation's highest court, following his selection of Justice Sonia Sotomayor in May 2009. Notably the first female Solicitor General and first female dean of Harvard Law School, if Kagan is confirmed, she will also be the fourth woman ever to serve on the Court.

- **Further Information:** New York Times: [Articles on Elena Kagan](#) | Law Library of Congress: [Web presentation on Elena Kagan](#)

The U.S. Supreme Court was officially established with the ratification of the Constitution in 1789. [The Constitution](#), however, does not go into great detail about the Court's function, so much consideration has been necessary in the past two centuries to determine its purview.

The Supreme Court is the highest court in the nation, and therefore is the primary overseer of the judicial branch of the government, which, alongside the legislative branch and executive branch, is a key component of a system of checks and balances. Compared to the other two branches, though, the Supreme Court's responsibilities are relatively straightforward, with its most significant being judicial review. This process imbues the Court with the power of determining whether existing laws are unconstitutional. [...] The constitution does not stipulate how many justices may sit on the bench, but since 1869 the Supreme Court has maintained nine -one chief justice and eight associate justices. When a vacancy appears, a new justice is appointed by the president and approved by a majority vote in the Senate. An odd number is needed to break ties. Once appointed, the justices serve for life, unless illness, retirement or illegal or unethical conduct force them out (the latter of which has never been done in the Court's history). [...]

Overall, the Supreme Court has had an immeasurable impact on the American political system and way of life. Its existence has helped maintain fairness and balance in the United States government, and its decisions have in some way affected virtually every member of society. PBS News Hour: [Formation and Function of the Supreme Court](#). Background, Activities and Critical Analysis.

**America.gov:** Please see the [eJournal on the U.S. Supreme Court](#). Supreme Court nominee Elena Kagan who is currently the Solicitor General of the U.S., wrote about [The Role of the Solicitor General](#). As the U.S. government's representative in all legal cases involving the government, the Office of the Solicitor General participates in three-quarters of the cases considered by the Supreme Court.

#### Teaching Sources & Links

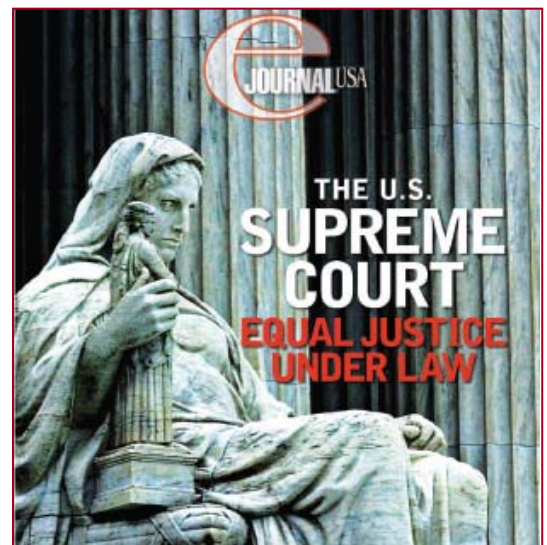
- PBS News Hour: Supreme Court Watch - [Profiles of the Judges](#)
- America.gov: [The Justices of the Supreme Court](#)
- EDstement Lesson Plan: [The Supreme Court: The Judicial Power of the United States](#) | LessonPlanet: [Supreme Court Lesson Plans](#)
- U.S. Courts: [About U.S. Federal Courts](#)



© [Supreme Court of the United States](#)

#### The Constitution of the United States of America

**Article II. Section 2:** "[The President] ... shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate shall appoint Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls, Judges of the Supreme Court [...]."



[The U.S. Supreme Court: Equal Justice Under Law](#)  
eJournal USA (October 2009)



An artist's drawing depicts U.S. Solicitor General Elena Kagan presenting the government's case before the Supreme Court. © America.gov/AP Image



© Scholastic: [Asian Pacific American Heritage. Angel Island: Li Keng Wong's Story](#): In 1933, seven-year-old Li Keng Wong's life changed. Her father decided to move his family from a small village in China to the Chinatown in Oakland, California. Now, Li Keng will tell you her story from 70 years ago.



America.gov: [People & Places](#)

**U.S. HISTORY IN BRIEF**

The Learner English Series  
for students of English as a Second Language

**US History Learner English** - This is the first in a planned series of books to help readers improve their English skills. Each book will teach you something about the United States. This book is about U.S. history. You can read the text or listen as a native-speaker reads it aloud.

© The NYTimes' [interactive Immigration Explorer Map](#) allows you to select a foreign-born group and trace how they settled across the United States.

## Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

Every immigrant brings to the United States his or her unique culture, which, as a result of assimilation and acculturation, have become a rich part of American society. This holds true for Asian and Pacific Americans, whose culture is recognized and practiced in innumerable venues.

This month, we honor all Americans who trace their ancestry to Asia and the Pacific Islands. Asian-Pacific-American Heritage Month, a celebration of Asian and Pacific Islanders in the United States. It's great time to explore the art, food, music, and writing of these fascinating and varied cultures.

**President Obama's Proclamation: [Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, 2010](#)**: "For centuries, America's story has been tied to the Pacific. Generations of brave men and women have crossed this vast ocean, seeking better lives and opportunities, and weaving their rich heritage into our cultural tapestry." [White House](#)

### Links & Teaching Resources

- America.gov: [Asian Americans: A Closer Look](#)
- U.S. Census Bureau: [Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month](#)
- Library of Congress: [Asian-Pacific Heritage Month](#)
- TeacherVision: [Asian-Pacific-American Heritage Month](#)
- The [Smithsonian Institution's Asian Pacific American Program](#)
- [Asian Nation: The First Asian Americans](#)
- PBS: [Asian American History Web Sites and Curricula Resources](#)
- PBS: [Asian American Timeline](#)
- PBS: Becoming an American: [The Chinese Experience Timeline](#)
- Scholastic: [Coming to America](#) | [Asian Pacific American Heritage](#)

**America.gov Article:** [Graphic Novels: Drawing the Asian-American Experience](#)

**Book:** [Asian Reflections on the American Landscape: Identifying and Interpreting Asian Heritage](#). National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2005 (full text available online)

### Immigration

The United States continues to be a magnet for immigrants, and those newcomers contribute mightily to American life just as earlier generations did, says journalist and educator Steve Roberts. He recently introduced his new book, *From Every End of This Earth: 13 Families and the New Lives They Made in America*, which presents the stories of recent immigrants from 17 countries. [...] A common thread in the U.S. immigration picture is "an elasticity to our [self-] definition," Roberts said. "Anyone from anywhere can define himself as an American in a way that's not true anywhere else in the world." And America continues to improve because immigrants bring "new energy, new blood and new entrepreneurial spirit." Still, he acknowledged that "as much as we celebrate the glory of our immigrant history, America has always been ambivalent," passing through periods of "very virulent anti-immigrant feeling." Opponents "almost always use the same language, whether it's against the Irish in the 1840s, the Italians in the 1920s ... or the Hispanics today, and that language is, 'American is now perfect and we have to pull up the drawbridge because the next group will corrupt our culture,'" Roberts said. But, he insisted, "That's a profound misreading of American history — because the genius of America is that we're never finished." [America.gov Article](#)

President Obama and senior members of his administration have criticized a new law by the state of Arizona that requires police to check those suspected of being illegal immigrants for immigration paperwork. They say the Arizona law highlights the need for the U.S. Congress to enact comprehensive and common sense immigration reform. [Article](#)

### Teaching Material

**[Learning About U.S. Immigration With The New York Times](#)**. The NYT Learning Network (April 27, 2010): "The Times's [interactive Immigration Explorer Map](#) allows you to select a foreign-born group and trace how they settled across the United States. [Here are] [five quick ways to teach about current issues](#) in immigration as well as a list of nearly [40 immigration-related lesson plans](#), [useful Topics pages and multimedia from The Times](#) and [rich resources from around the Web](#).

## Essential Pleasures: Reading

**Reading Tips:** [About.com: English as 2<sup>nd</sup> Language](#): Reading in English is a great way to improve your English. Here are some specific suggestions for ways to use your reading to work on specific English skills. A number of suggestions have links to lesson plans which you can use in class. Each lesson plan provides objectives, the lesson plan step-by-step and materials to use in class.

### Links

- [Audible.com's Classics selections](#) and [AudioBooksforFree.com](#) are two resources for audio recordings of literary texts.
- [National Institute for Literacy](#) provides information about research, practices, and policies aimed to improve reading instruction for children, youth, and adults. (Dep. of Education)
- [Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers](#) features easy-to-do parent tips, video clips and transcripts from interviews with some of the U.S.'s foremost reading experts, etc. (PBS & Dep. of Education)
- [Reading Planet](#) is designed to help families and children explore the world of books. It features an annotated list of 1,000 children's books that can be browsed by age group, author, or category. (Department of Education)
- [Read.gov](#). The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress invites people of all ages to discover the fascinating people, places and events that await you whenever you read.

**Teaching:** [What's Your Reading History? Reflecting on the Self as Reader](#): What does it mean to be literate? How do our reading experiences shape who we are? In this lesson, students reflect on a formative reading experience and use it as a springboard for tracing their reading lives by creating timelines to reflect past and present experiences. They culminate the personal reading history project through reading, writing and/or discussion. (NYT Learning Network, March 4, 2010)

**Interesting Article:** [Why Do Boys Lag Behind Girls in Reading?](#) (New York Times, March 27, 2010)

## Language

**New York Times Article:** [Listening to \(and Saving\) the World's Languages](#). "The chances of overhearing a conversation in Vlashki, a variant of Istro-Romanian, are greater in Queens than in the remote mountain villages in Croatia that immigrants now living in New York left years ago. [...] The United Nations keeps an atlas of languages facing extinction, and experts there as well as linguists generally agree that a language will probably disappear in a generation or two when the population of native speakers is both too small and in decline. Language attrition has also been hastened by war, ethnic cleansing and compulsory schooling in a national tongue." (April 28, 2010)

**NYT Learning Network:** [Do You Speak My Language? Considering the Relationship Between Language and Culture](#). What does culture mean in an increasingly globalized, connected world? What is the relationship between language & culture? In this lesson, students consider the connection between French and other cultures and languages by discussing key quotations from relevant Times articles and sharing their insights on the questions they raise. (April 30, 2010)

### Related Resources

- The NYT Learning Network: [Lesson: Having the Last Word](#) | [Lesson: Speaking in Tongues](#)
- NYTimes.com: [Freakonomics Blog: What Will Globalization Do to Languages?](#) | [Ideas Blog: The Rise of 'Globish'](#)

**PBS:** [Do You Speak American?](#) is the companion website for a film that takes us cross-country to examine the dynamic state of American English and ask: Why do Maine lobstermen and Texas cowboys speak English so differently? How many varieties of American English are there? Is TV making us all sound the same? Topics include 100 common mispronunciations, how language is changing, local color in American literature, and regional writers. (MacNeil/Lehrer Productions, National Endowment for the Humanities)

**Lesson Plans:** [African American English](#) | [Perspectives on Written & Spoken English](#) | [Major Regional Dialects](#) | [Spanish & Chicano English](#) | [Communicative Choices & Linguistic Style](#) | [High School Teachers' Manual/Guide](#)

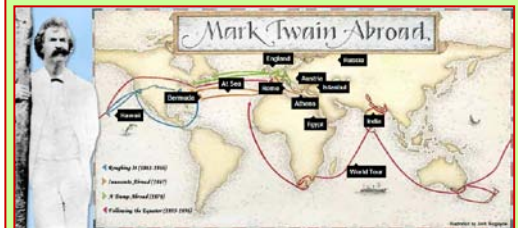


© [Read.gov](#)

### Listening to Native Speakers

Please see the Learner Version of [USA History in Brief](#) we introduced on page two: Each chapter in this [HTML edition](#) is accompanied by an audio file of a native speaker reading that chapter. If you listen while you read, you can hear exactly how each word is pronounced when you see it.

### Literature: More on Mark Twain



To mark the 100th year of Mark Twain's death America.gov created two additional new features: [Mark Twain Abroad](#) and [Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn](#).

### Interesting Teaching Resources

#### [EFL Classroom 2.0: Lessons in a Can ebook](#)

"We have 100s of lessons here! All with materials to download and use in the classroom. Click and go. The "level" is only what is recommended. Most can be modified for many levels. Enjoy, happy eating!"

[Free English Lessons Online](#): "Learn English online with free English language lessons. Games, video listening quizzes, grammar, vocabulary, teaching resources and more! Free quizzes, games, printable worksheets and activities for esl students, young learners & kids."

## Confusing Words

[Confusing Words](#) is a collection of 3210 words that are troublesome to readers and writers. Words are grouped according to the way they are most often confused or misused.

### Interesting Fact

**PBS:** [Half the countries of the world have an official language](#). The United States isn't one of them. The definition of an official language is one that has been specifically designated in the Constitution of a country or territory. Officially *recognized* languages are often mistaken for official languages.



General Stanley McChrystal and Ambassador Murphy  
© John Self/ U.S. Embassy



## In Focus – Ambassador Murphy’s Heroes

Our [Ambassador Philip Murphy](#) has introduced his heroes to the audiences during his town hall meetings. In this month’s edition we will focus on the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force and the U.S. forces in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal.

While holding talks in Berlin on April 21, **General McChrystal** stressed that ISAF’s main goal is to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters and to provide a level of security and stability for the Afghan people that will allow their country to thrive. He stressed that the work of coalition forces is crucial to the mission in Afghanistan, even as Afghanistan’s own forces continue to take over the job of securing the country. General McChrystal emphasized his continued belief that it will be possible to start drawing down ISAF forces next year. The pace will depend on conditions but it is very probable that Afghanistan will need the assistance of the International Community for many years to come.

General McChrystal praised the work of Germany’s troops and civilians in Afghanistan and that he is proud of their work and honored to serve alongside them. He also conveyed his deepest sympathies to the families of the Bundeswehr soldiers who have lost their lives in Afghanistan, including the seven who died in recent weeks. In January 2010, Ambassador Murphy visited Afghanistan as a guest of the Bundeswehr and the German Ministry of Defense. He was also impressed by their capabilities and professionalism. German soldiers in the Hindu Kush are proud of their efforts to produce a more stable future for Afghanistan. A colonel who had just finished one month of service told the Ambassador: “I arrived optimistic, and now, I’m even more optimistic.”

### Links & Articles

- NATO: [Commander ISAF - General Stanley A. McChrystal](#)
- Newsweek: [McChrystal’s War](#) (September 26, 2009)
- Time Magazine: [The New U.S. Commander in Afghanistan](#) (May 2009)

### Memorial Day (May 31)

Beginning after the 1861–65 Civil War, many states observed a May 30 holiday (known as “Decoration Day”) honoring the lives lost in that conflict, often by decorating their graves with flowers. After the First World War, these ceremonies were expanded to include the nation’s war dead in every conflict. All 50 states observe the holiday in honor of those who died defending their nation.

- [Veterans’ Stories](#) – Hear from submariners who served during various conflicts.
- [Patriotic Melodies](#) – Learn about patriotic songs, incl. Over There, This Land Is Your Land, etc.
- [American Recipes](#) – You will find a mix of interesting American concoctions.



### World Cup 2010

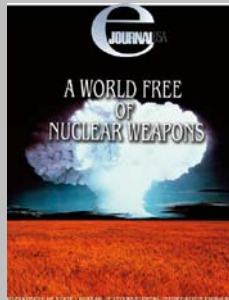
Webchat with Ambassador Murphy on Thursday, May 27, 15:00 – 16:00

For further details please see the [Ambassador’s Facebook page](#).

(Look for the profile: [Botschafter Philip Murphy](#))



### eJournal USA A World Free of Nuclear Weapons



Since the first atomic bombs exploded in 1945, some have tried to rid the world of nuclear weapons. President Obama has embraced this goal with new vigor. This eJournal USA examines the challenges to achieving nuclear disarmament. [MORE](#)

*“I state clearly and with conviction America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. I’m not naive. This goal will not be reached quickly – perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence...”* President Obama, April 2009

[Download the PDF](#)

America.gov: [Understanding U.S. Nuclear Strategy](#)



### usa.usembassy.de

About the USA is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

This newsletter is produced by the Information Resource Centers/U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany.

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