

Television Cameras and Other Media in Courtrooms

Use of television cameras and other communications media in courtrooms raise questions of how to fairly balance every individual's right to a fair trial with the public's right to know what is happening in courts. Activities ask you to analyze whether still photographs or live streaming should be allowed in judicial courtrooms, and if so, when and how should Supreme Court or other court proceedings should be televised or live streamed.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic (April 2020), for the first time in history, the Supreme Court announced it would make publicly available an audio feed of oral arguments between lawyers and the justices, which were being conducted by telephone conference calls. Before that, no audio/video recording, photography, or television/live streaming had been allowed in the Supreme Court's courtroom.



[Watch on YouTube](#)

Since 1996, a small number of federal courts of appeals and district courts have begun allowing photography and television coverage of oral arguments ([SCOTUS blog](#), April 27, 2020).

Many lawmakers, lawyers, and members of the public believe cameras and television should be allowed in the Supreme Court and other courtrooms, while other people are unwilling to depart from historical precedent. The first bill to allow

cameras in federal courts was introduced in 1937. C-Span (Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network) began broadcasting the House of Representatives in 1979 and the Senate in 1986.

Presently, Congress is considering the [Cameras in the Courtroom Act](#), introduced in 2019 and now the **Sunshine in the Courtroom Act** (2023) which would permit television coverage of all open sessions of the Supreme Court, unless a majority of the Justices voted otherwise in order to protect the rights of those involved in a case. For background, [Grassley Renews Bipartisan Push to Put Cameras in Federal, Supreme Courts](#) (March 6, 2023).

Activity 1: Analyze the Implications of Cameras in Courtrooms

Conduct research, including Internet research and surveying friends and family, for one or more of the following prompts:

- What are the arguments for and against allowing cameras in the Supreme Court?
- What are the arguments for and against televising or live streaming the proceedings of the Supreme Court?
- How might television coverage, live streaming, real-time audio recordings, and photography in courtrooms impact the Supreme Court's consideration of cases that will significantly influence people's lives, such as freedom of speech, due process under the law, freedom of religion, and the other rights?
- Would public opinion be influenced in positive or negative ways by media coverage of the Supreme Court?
- Would the Supreme Court justices be less impartial and more influenced by how the public might perceive them based on the media coverage?

Based on your findings, **write an opinion piece for your school or local newsletter** about whether there should be cameras allowed in the Supreme Court courtroom.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Analyze the Implications of Cameras in the Courtroom](#) by Lisbel Vargas

Activity 2: Design a Format for Future Supreme Court TV Coverage

Begin by watching [C-Span coverage of the House](#) and [Senate](#) to see one model for broadcasting the activities of the legislative branch of government. Pay attention to camera angles, audio, captions, and other features of the broadcast.

- Then consider: How does C-Span's coverage differ from other televised events, such as the Super Bowl, the World Series, the State of the Union address, or the Academy Awards?
- Imagine that you work at a TV production company that has been selected to design the first-ever live TV broadcast of the Supreme Court oral arguments. Your boss asks for a proposal from everyone in your company for the best way to design a TV broadcast that will have the most viewers of all ages...

Design a proposal for how you would produce a TV broadcast of the Supreme Court oral arguments.

- How will you captivate the attention of younger and older viewers alike?
- What camera angles would suggest? Why?
- Would you include graphics? Sidebars? Scrolling text at the bottom of the screen? Why or why not?
- Would you have hosts and commentators describing the action?
- Would you include interactive features such as opportunities for viewers to post comments online?

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Design a Format for Future Supreme Court TV Coverage](#) by Megan Griffin

Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

[Building Democracy for All: Landmark First Amendment Rights Cases](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
 - *Research, analyze and report orally or in writing on one area in which Supreme Court Decisions have made significant changes over time in citizens' lives.* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) **[8.T5.6]**
- [ISTE Standards](#)
 - Knowledge Constructor
 - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
 - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
 - Creative Communicator
 - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
 - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
 - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
 - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
 - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
 - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7



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