Courts and Choices

Trace an Alabama case and compare how judges are selected.

SS24.AS.20a "Describe the state court system in Alabama, and explain how the election of judges in Alabama differs from the appointment of judges at the federal level."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number the first mention of each of the three courts on the possible burglary appeal path in paragraph 2, starting with the trial court. Underline the words in paragraph 3 that tell who chooses Alabama judges and federal judges.

Where Does a Case Go?

1. A courthouse door does not tell you which judge will hear a case. Alabama has several kinds of trial courts, each with a different job. District courts handle many misdemeanors, smaller civil disputes, and early hearings in felony cases. Circuit courts have broad authority, including felony trials and larger civil cases. Probate courts handle matters such as wills and estates. Municipal courts hear violations of city ordinances and certain misdemeanor offenses within a city. These courts do not form one simple staircase that every case climbs. The type of case helps determine where it begins.

2. Imagine a felony burglary trial in an Alabama circuit court. If the defendant is convicted and appeals, the case may go to the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals, which reviews criminal cases for legal errors. After that court decides, the Alabama Supreme Court may review its decision. These three courts form one possible path for this case, but not every appeal reaches the state's highest court. Civil appeals may instead go to the Alabama Court of Civil Appeals or the Alabama Supreme Court, depending on the case. An appeal reviews legal decisions rather than simply repeating a trial.

3. Alabama voters elect state district, circuit, probate, and appellate judges, including justices of the Alabama Supreme Court. These elections give voters a direct role in choosing many state judges. Municipal judges are an exception: city governing bodies appoint them. At the federal level, voters do not elect federal district judges, appeals court judges, or Supreme Court justices. The president nominates these judges, and the U.S. Senate votes on confirmation. Once confirmed, federal judges in these courts generally serve during good behavior, often for life. The systems therefore differ in who chooses judges and in the length of a judge's service.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do district and circuit courts divide trial-court work in Alabama? Give one kind of case or hearing for each.

2. Trace one possible path for the burglary case from trial through the state's highest court. Why is the last step not guaranteed?

3. How does the selection of Alabama circuit and appellate judges differ from the selection of federal judges?

4. Why is it inaccurate to say that every Alabama judge is elected? Identify the exception and who selects those judges.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A visitor asks where to take a question about a will and whether a burglary appeal goes to that same court. Write a courthouse help-desk reply that answers both questions, traces a possible burglary appeal, and compares how Alabama state judges and federal judges are selected, including the municipal exception.

ANSWER KEY

Courts and Choices

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.AS.20a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number the first mention of each of the three courts on the possible burglary appeal path in paragraph 2, starting with the trial court. Underline the words in paragraph 3 that tell who chooses Alabama judges and federal judges. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do district and circuit courts divide trial-court work in Alabama? Give one kind of case or hearing for each.	**District courts handle matters such as misdemeanors or early felony hearings. Circuit courts handle felony trials or larger civil cases.**
2	Trace one possible path for the burglary case from trial through the state's highest court. Why is the last step not guaranteed?	**The trial is in circuit court, an appeal may go to the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals, and the Alabama Supreme Court may then review its decision. Not every appeal reaches the Supreme Court.**
3	How does the selection of Alabama circuit and appellate judges differ from the selection of federal judges?	**Alabama voters elect circuit and appellate judges. The president nominates federal judges, and the U.S. Senate votes on confirmation.**
4	Why is it inaccurate to say that every Alabama judge is elected? Identify the exception and who selects those judges.	**Municipal judges are not elected by voters; city governing bodies appoint them.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

For a question about a will, start with Alabama's probate court, which handles wills and estates. A felony burglary trial can take place in circuit court. An appeal after a conviction may go to the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals, and the Alabama Supreme Court may later review that decision. Alabama voters elect state judges in courts such as circuit and probate courts. However, city governing bodies appoint municipal judges. Federal judges follow another process: the president nominates them, and the U.S. Senate votes on whether to confirm them.

Accept other accurate examples of district and circuit court work from the passage. In the help-desk reply, the Supreme Court must be presented as a possible, not automatic, step.