Ruling on the Buses

How courts applied constitutional protections in Alabama

SS24.USG.6 "Summarize the functions and duties of the judicial branch, including the power of judicial review and interpretation of laws. 6a Explain the structure, jurisdiction, and processes of civil and criminal courts in the United States..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each court's jurisdiction, circle the constitutional clause the judges applied, and number the named cases in the order their decisions occurred.

A Bus Case Reaches the Supreme Court

1. In 1956, four Black women challenged Montgomery, Alabama, bus segregation in federal court. Their civil lawsuit, *Browder v. Gayle*, asked judges to decide whether government-enforced separation on buses violated the Constitution. A federal district court heard the case first, exercising original jurisdiction, the authority to hear and decide a case initially. No one was being prosecuted for a crime. The women sought an order ending an unequal government policy, not a criminal sentence.

2. The district court ruled that bus segregation violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. It drew on *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 Supreme Court decision rejecting racial segregation in public schools. Applying that constitutional principle to buses was judicial review: judges tested a government policy against the Constitution. Alabama appealed, but the Supreme Court affirmed the ruling, exercising appellate jurisdiction rather than hearing witnesses again. Montgomery's buses were desegregated after the ruling took effect.

3. The case shows why interpretation matters: the Constitution does not specifically mention bus seats. A strict constructionist generally favors a narrow reading of constitutional language, while a loose constructionist is more willing to apply broad constitutional principles to new situations. Neither label alone tells us how every judge would decide a case. Federal judges, including Supreme Court justices, are nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate. They serve during good behavior, which usually means life tenure.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why was *Browder v. Gayle* a civil case, and which court had original jurisdiction?

2. How did judicial review and appellate jurisdiction each figure in this case?

3. How did *Brown* shape the Alabama ruling, and what changed after the ruling took effect?

4. How might strict and loose constructionists differ when interpreting a constitutional clause that does not mention bus seats?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Suppose a city bans peaceful signs in public parks. In four sentences, trace a possible civil case through original and appellate jurisdiction, then contrast how strict and loose constructionists might approach the speech claim without predicting a guaranteed outcome.

ANSWER KEY

Ruling on the Buses

GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each court's jurisdiction, circle the constitutional clause the judges applied, and number the named cases in the order their decisions occurred. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why was *Browder v. Gayle* a civil case, and which court had original jurisdiction?	**The women sought an order ending bus segregation, not a criminal sentence. The federal district court had original jurisdiction.**
2	How did judicial review and appellate jurisdiction each figure in this case?	**The district court tested bus segregation against the Constitution. The Supreme Court reviewed and affirmed that ruling on appeal.**
3	How did *Brown* shape the Alabama ruling, and what changed after the ruling took effect?	**The district court applied Brown's reasoning about racial segregation to buses. Montgomery's buses were then desegregated.**
4	How might strict and loose constructionists differ when interpreting a constitutional clause that does not mention bus seats?	**A strict constructionist might favor a narrow reading of the clause. A loose constructionist might apply its broad principle to bus segregation.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A person could bring a civil lawsuit in federal district court, where a judge would first hear the challenge to the city's sign ban. If either side appealed, an appellate court would review the ruling rather than start the trial again. A strict constructionist might focus closely on the text and historical meaning of the First Amendment's speech protection. A loose constructionist might emphasize how that protection applies to public signs today, but neither approach guarantees a particular result.

Accept different plausible descriptions of each interpretive approach. The response should distinguish an initial hearing from appellate review and should not treat either approach as requiring a specific verdict.