

# Animals in the Architecture

## Animal Symbolism at the Supreme Court

The architect, Cass Gilbert, believed that the Supreme Court Building's function should be obvious from its architecture and symbolism. In other words, visitors should be able to tell just from looking at the building and its architectural features that it is a court of law. In addition to symbols associated with the law, there are many animals featured in the building design. Can you find the animals pictured below? What do you think these animals symbolize?

***Hint:** Some of the animals are located on the outside of the building!*



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## Answer Key



1. **Tortoise:** The fable of the tortoise and the hare, in which the slow and steady tortoise wins the race against the faster, but over-confident hare, is represented on the East Pediment. Tortoises represent the slow and steady pace of justice.



*The hare (far left) and the tortoise (far right).*

2. **Eagle:** Eagles symbolize the United States, a bird of freedom, or superiority and swiftness. This eagle can be found in the spiral staircase bronzework on the ground floor.

3. & 4. **Lions' heads:** A symbol of majesty and strength, lions' heads (#3) are on the roofline. #4 can be found in the Great Hall.

5. **Hare:** Located in the East Pediment, the fabled hare lost the race to the slow but steady tortoise.

6. **Tortoise:** Tortoises like this one are located at the bottom of bronze lampposts on the building grounds.

7. **Dolphins:** Found on the bronze flagpole bases on the front plaza, dolphins are a maritime symbol of the sea and swiftness.

8. **Rams' heads:** Representing strength, rams' heads are found on the marble lampposts on the front plaza and marble urns on the rear plaza.

9. **Owl:** A common symbol of wisdom, this owl is located on elevator and spiral staircase bronze door frames on the ground floor.