

A Trip to the Supreme Court Building

An Activity Booklet recommended for ages 10+





Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Meeting Sites of the Court | 3 |
| Symbols of Law | 4 |
| Symbols of Justice | 5 |
| Symbols of Justice - Part 2 | 6 |
| Draw your own Symbols | 7 |
| Portrait Hunt: Who Am I? | 8 |
| Portrait Hunt - Part 2 | 9 |
| Chief Justice John Marshall | 10 |
| Animals in the Architecture | 11 |
| Supreme Court Word Puzzle | 12 |
| Color a Courtroom Ceiling Rosette | 13 |
| Symbols of Law & Justice Answer Key | 14 |
| Animals in the Architecture Answer Key | 15 |
| Portrait Hunt & Word Puzzle Answer Key | 16 |

Meeting Sites of the Court

Welcome to the Supreme Court of the United States! Since 1935, this building has been home to the nation's highest Court, but did you know that the Supreme Court hasn't always been here in Washington, D.C.? By law, the Supreme Court must meet in the nation's capital. Where was the nation's capital located before Washington became the capital city?



The Supreme Court held its first session on February 2, 1790 in **New York City** in a building known as The Exchange. In late 1790, when the federal government moved to **Philadelphia**, the Supreme Court followed and met there in three adjoining buildings. In 1800, when the federal government moved to **Washington, D.C.**, there were no plans for a separate building to house the Supreme Court. For more than 130 years, the Court met in several spaces within the U.S. Capitol Building. The Supreme Court Building, designed by Cass Gilbert, was constructed in the early 1930s. On October 7, 1935, the Justices sat for the first time in their new building.

Symbols of Law

What kinds of symbols are used to represent the law?

There are many symbols of law both inside and outside the Supreme Court Building. There are far more symbols than just the ones that appear on this page, but this is a good place to start looking! Can you find these and other examples of symbols of law?



Tablets are often used to represent the concept of law. The imposing, seated male statue *Authority of Law* holds a tablet with the Latin word “LEX” (law) and a sword that represents the power or authority of the law.

Books also appear as symbols representing learning, written knowledge, and judgment. In a few instances, the word “LEX” is carved into the book, making it a symbol for a law book.



Perhaps the most ancient symbol associated with the law is also one of the most familiar, the **Scales of Justice**. Symbolizing the impartial deliberation, or weighing, of two sides in a legal dispute, scales are found both inside and outside the building.

In the image on the far right, a **lamp** appears between the scales of justice. The lamp is a symbol of wisdom.



Symbols of Justice

Symbols of Justice on the building's front plaza

Justice is one of the most recognized symbols in the architecture of the Supreme Court Building. Portraying *Justice* as a female figure dates back to ancient mythology.

Over time, *Justice* became associated with **scales** to represent impartiality and a **sword** to symbolize power. In the 1500s, *Justice* was often portrayed with a **blindfold**. The origin of the blindfold is unclear, but the blindfold is generally accepted today as a symbol of fairness. All of these symbols are shown in the image on the right.

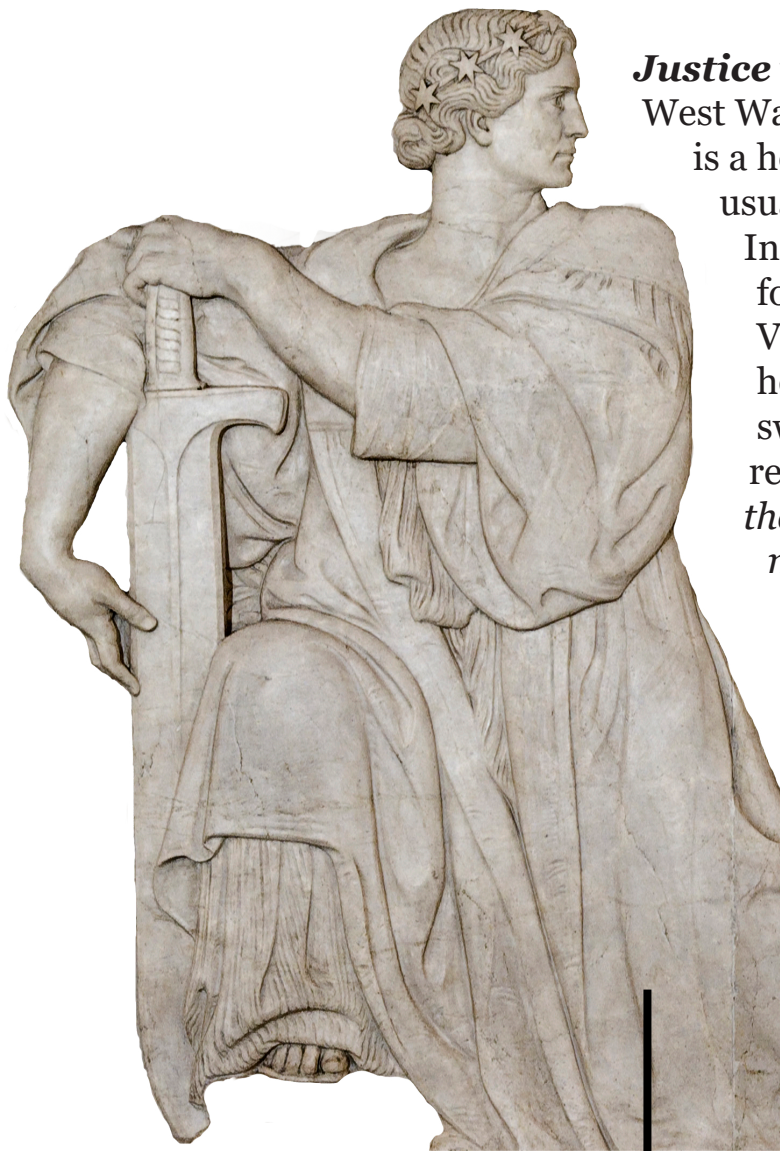


In the *Contemplation of Justice* statue, a seated female figure holds a smaller figure of blindfolded *Justice* in her right hand. Blindfolded *Justice* cradles a set of scales in her arms.



Symbols of Justice

Symbols of Justice inside the Supreme Court Building



Justice without a blindfold appears in the West Wall Frieze in the Courtroom. A *frieze* is a horizontal band of sculpted decoration usually found on a wall near the ceiling. In this work, a robed *Justice* is the focus of the story of the battle of “Good Versus Evil.” Notice how she rests her hand atop the hilt (handle) of her sword—what do you think *Justice* is ready to do? **Hint:** Follow her gaze all the way to the right. See page 14 for more information about the figures highlighted below.



The West Wall Frieze in the Courtroom

Symbols of Law & Justice

Draw your own symbols!

How might you use art to symbolize the law? How about *Justice*? In the space below, draw your version of some of the symbols artists used at the Supreme Court or create new symbols of your own!

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
| | |

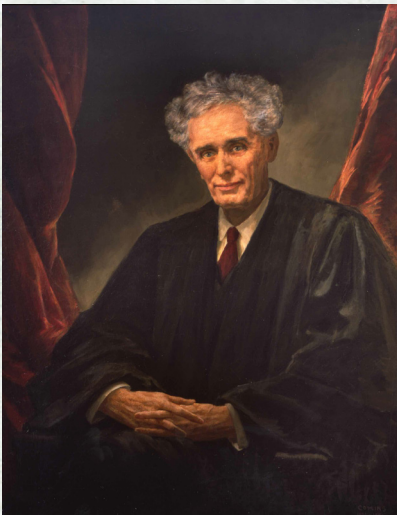
Portrait Hunt: Who Am I?

Can you find these portraits and name the Justice?



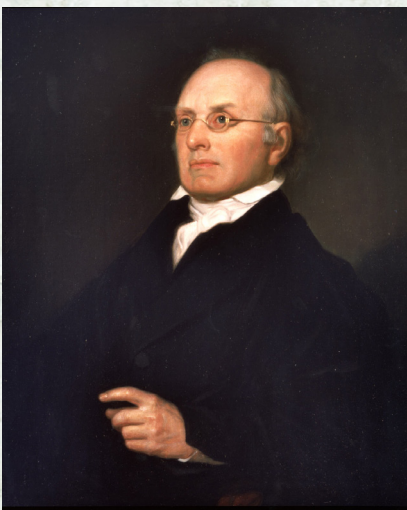
I represented New York in the first and second Continental Congresses, was one of the negotiators of the peace treaty with Great Britain after the Revolutionary War, and contributed to the Federalist Papers. In 1789, President George Washington named me the first Chief Justice of the United States. I served as Chief Justice until 1795 when I resigned to become governor of New York.

Who Am I? _____



As a practicing lawyer, I was called “the People’s Attorney” for my frequent pro bono work (work without pay) as an advocate for public causes, such as supporting workers’ rights and minimum fair wages. When President Woodrow Wilson nominated me to the Supreme Court in 1916 and the U.S. Senate confirmed me, I became the first Jewish Justice to serve on the Supreme Court.

Who Am I? _____



Appointed in 1811 at age 32, I was the youngest Justice to ever join the Court. I worked closely with Chief Justice John Marshall to define how the Supreme Court would work in the new nation. My son, William Wetmore Story, sculpted the bronze statue of John Marshall displayed on the ground floor.

Who Am I? _____

Portrait Hunt: Who Am I?

Can you find these portraits and name the Justice?



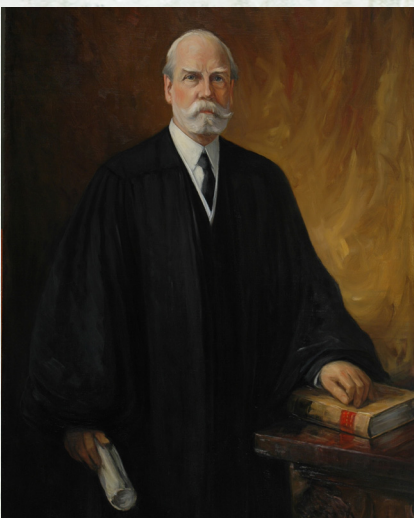
Before I joined the Supreme Court as an Associate Justice, I argued several cases before the Supreme Court in support of racial equality, including the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). My arguments helped convince the Court to declare segregation in public schools unconstitutional. In 1965, I became the first African American Solicitor General. In 1967, I became the first African American Supreme Court Justice.

Who Am I? _____



In 1981, I made history when President Ronald Reagan nominated me to be the first woman appointed to the Supreme Court. The U.S. Senate unanimously confirmed my nomination, and I served on the Supreme Court for 24 years. My achievements in public service helped pave the way for the advancement of women in the legal field.

Who Am I? _____



I served on the Supreme Court twice. The first time, I was an Associate Justice, but I resigned from the Court in 1916 to run for President. I lost the presidential election, but eventually returned to the Supreme Court, this time as Chief Justice. President Herbert Hoover nominated me to become Chief Justice and I served in this role from 1930-1941. I was the first Chief Justice to preside over sessions in the Supreme Court Building.

Who Am I? _____

Chief Justice John Marshall

Learn about “The Great Chief Justice”

LOOK: Chief Justice John Marshall is shown seated in a chair, his right palm upturned as if he is gesturing and referring to the opinion rolled up in his left hand. *What impressions of Chief Justice Marshall do you get from looking closely at this statue?*

DISCOVER: John Marshall was the fourth Chief Justice of the United States. He is often called “**The Great Chief Justice**,” not only for the 34 years he served as Chief Justice—the longest service of any Chief Justice to date—but also for his role in helping to make the Supreme Court a co-equal branch of the federal government. His opinion in *Marbury v. Madison* (1803) helped to establish the process of **judicial review**, which refers to the Supreme Court’s power to declare acts of Congress and the President unconstitutional. While the words “judicial review” are not written anywhere in the U.S. Constitution, many Founding Fathers believed this power would reside with the Supreme Court. Today, it is considered one of the “checks and balances” that ensures each branch of government can limit the powers of the others.

IMAGINE: John Marshall served as Chief Justice from 1801-1835. Imagine what it would have been like serving as a Justice during Marshall’s era. The Supreme Court met in DC, but the Justices spent a lot of time “**riding circuit**,” often traveling by horse and buggy to sit as judges and hear cases on lower courts around the country. *Do you think you would have enjoyed being a Justice in the 19th century? Why or why not?*



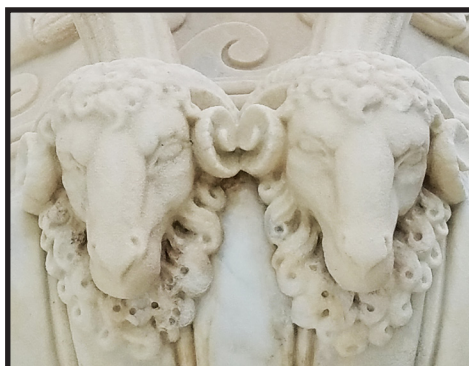
Chief Justice Marshall found in the Courtroom’s North Wall Frieze

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!*



Supreme Court Word Puzzle

Find a dozen words related to the work of the Supreme Court

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| J | A | K | W | Z | V | J | C | I | Y | X | J | Q | A | U |
| Q | U | J | V | H | J | E | O | A | V | X | F | T | D | T |
| O | T | F | D | R | S | N | U | D | D | Z | L | E | C | N |
| I | R | E | F | R | V | D | R | F | T | Y | A | H | Q | O |
| Y | N | A | E | J | J | F | T | Z | E | Y | O | C | P | I |
| Y | M | V | L | N | T | Y | R | Y | R | X | S | E | V | N |
| L | E | M | O | A | Z | D | O | L | F | K | T | Q | W | I |
| R | A | F | F | I | R | M | O | D | A | I | M | E | H | P |
| Z | W | H | E | W | P | G | M | C | T | H | F | P | I | O |
| E | C | I | T | S | U | J | U | I | L | L | S | J | G | B |
| I | R | G | A | X | M | I | O | M | U | E | X | R | R | W |
| M | L | Q | X | S | A | N | M | A | E | S | R | E | A | Z |
| T | A | X | V | M | O | N | O | Q | Y | N | Y | K | N | M |
| A | G | J | F | R | H | V | H | E | U | J | T | Z | T | R |
| X | N | H | R | H | I | Y | R | V | K | A | V | J | C | E |

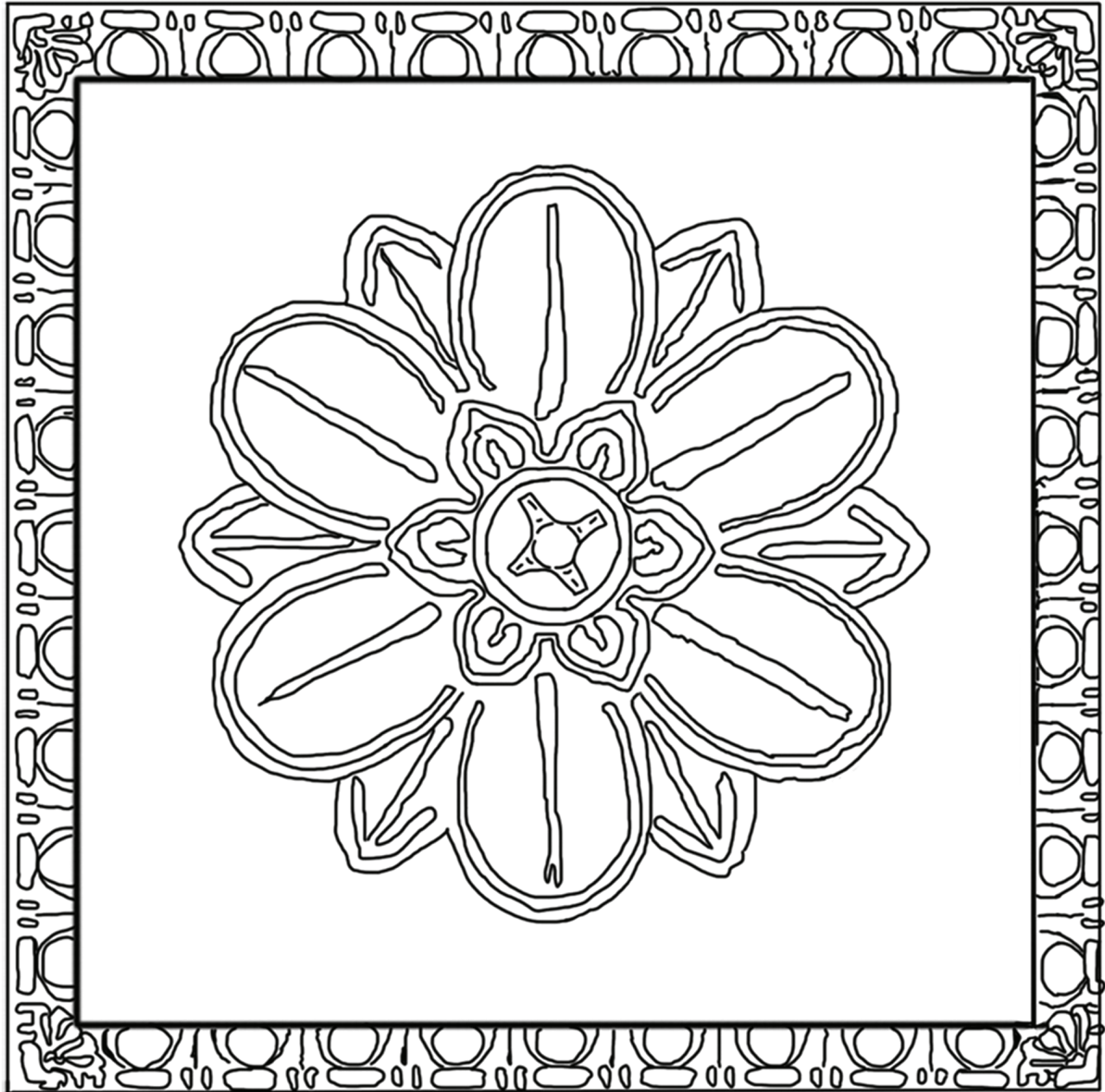


Justice
Courtroom
Clerk
Marshal
Oyez
Oral Argument

Petition
Grant
Deny
Opinion
Affirm
Reverse

Hint: Some of the words are backwards and/or diagonal!

Color a Courtroom Ceiling Rosette!



The ceiling in the Courtroom features a repeating pattern of four different **rosettes**, or flowers, set against a dark red background, like the rosette shown on the right. You can recreate this flower or choose colors of your own!

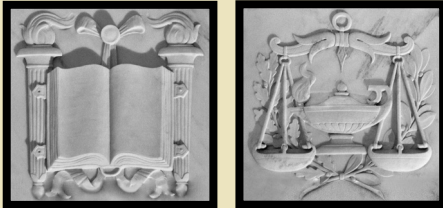


Symbols of Law & Justice

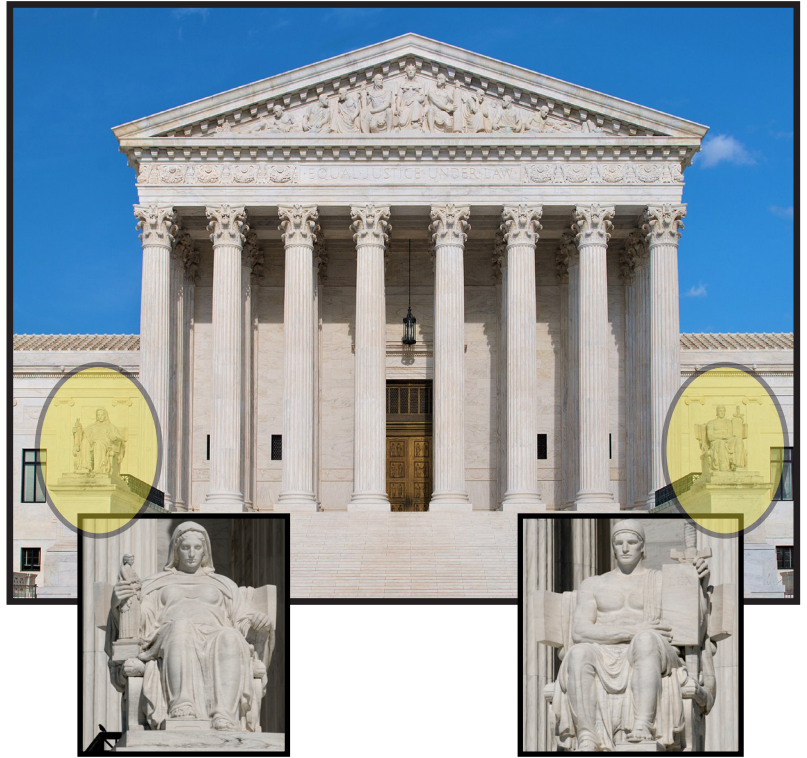
Answer Key



Symbols appear on elevator and spiral staircase bronze door frames.



Marble metopes (*meh-toe-pees*), sculpted architectural elements, are located in the Great Hall. (Look up!)



Contemplation of Justice

Authority of Law



Powers of Good



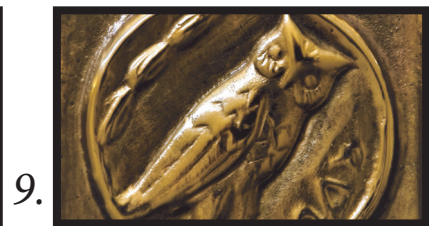
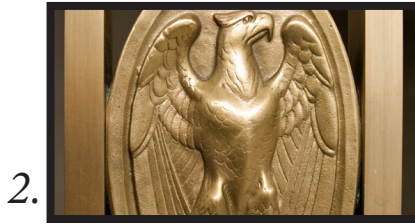
Powers of Evil

A figure representing *Justice*, shown without a blindfold, is ready to use her sword to battle the powers of evil. In the battle between good and evil, *Justice* will help to defeat evil.

To learn more about the architecture of the Supreme Court Building, see [Architectural Information](#).

Animals in the Architecture

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.

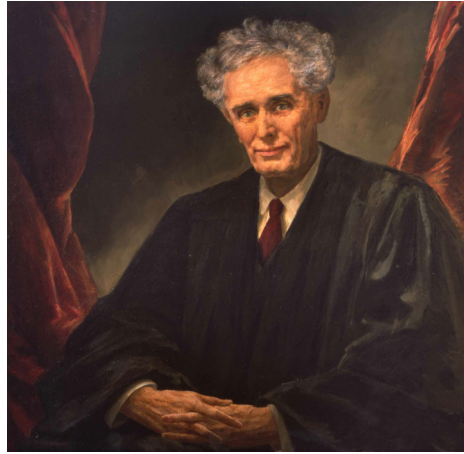
9. **Owl:** A common symbol of wisdom, this owl is located on elevator and spiral staircase bronze door frames on the ground floor.

Portrait Hunt & Word Puzzle

Answer Key



Chief Justice John Jay



Justice Louis D. Brandeis



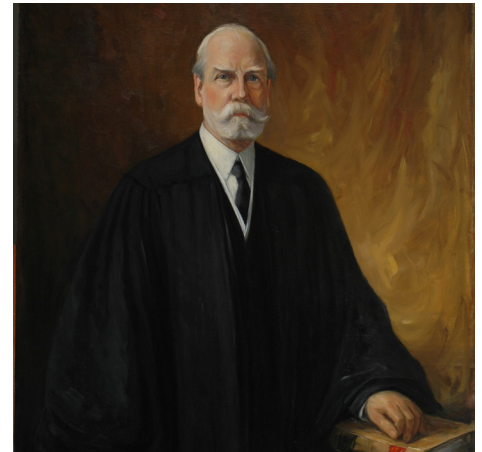
Justice Joseph Story



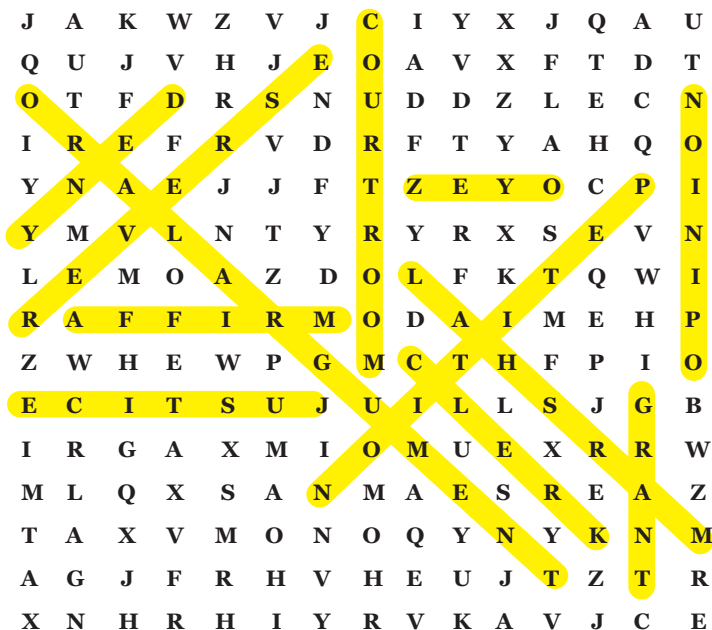
Justice Thurgood Marshall



Justice Sandra Day O'Connor



Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes



Office of the Curator
 Supreme Court of the United States
 1 First Street, NE
 Washington, DC 20543
www.supremecourt.gov

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