



Levels of Michigan's Judicial Branch of Government

Brief Reading
Maps
Matching Cards
Glossary

Social Studies
Grade Level Content Expectation
3 – C3.0.4



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Michigan's Judicial Branch of Government

There are three levels to Michigan's judicial branch of government. Each level has a different responsibility.

1 **Trial courts** decide cases. Most cases start and finish here. There is one judge, witnesses, and a jury. Trial courts are in every county in Michigan.



A trial court courtroom.

2 If people in the case think the trial court was not fair, they may ask the **Michigan Court of Appeals** to hear the case. Three judges listen to the lawyers and then decide.



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A Court of Appeals courtroom.

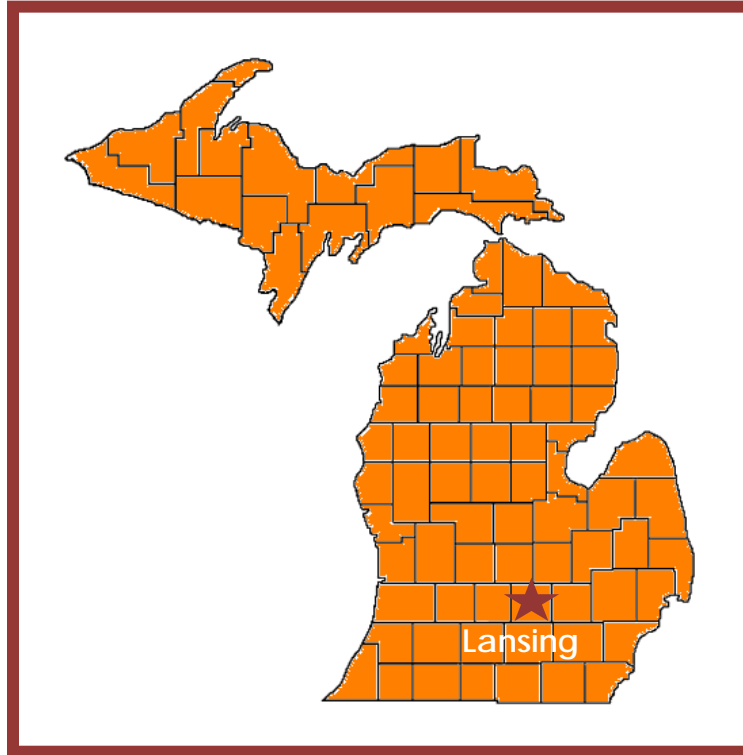
3 If people in the case think the answer still is not fair, they may ask the **Michigan Supreme Court** to make a final decision. Seven justices listen to the lawyers and then decide the case.



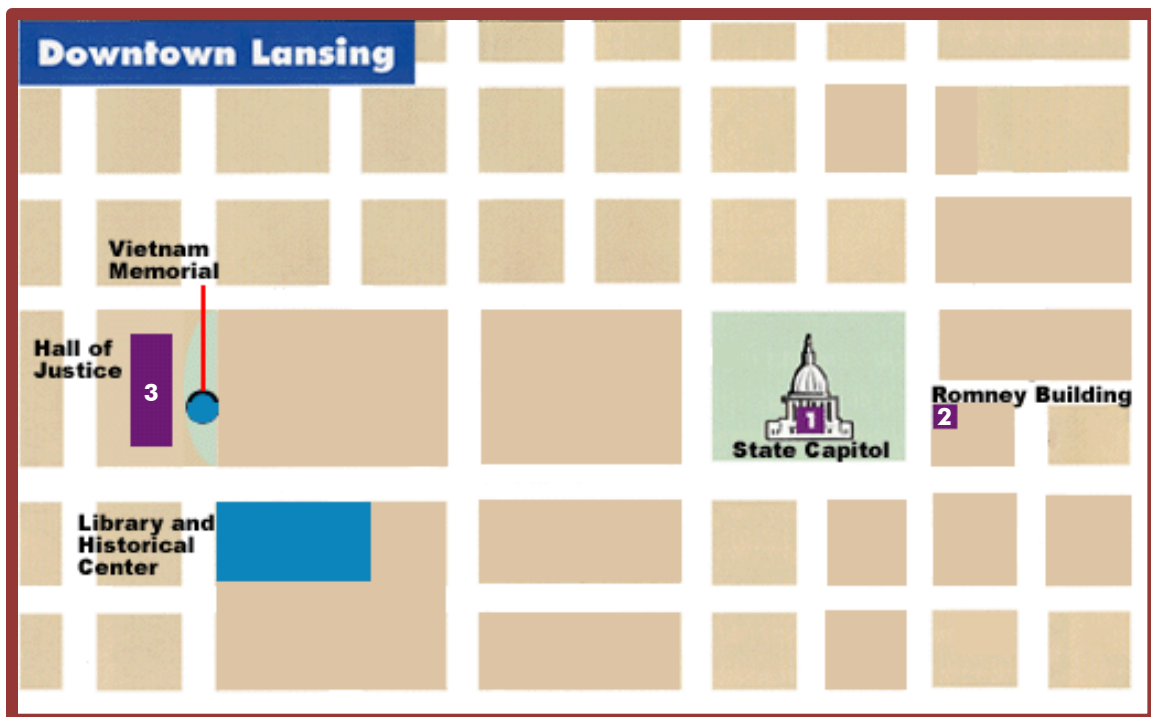
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The Michigan Supreme Court courtroom.

Michigan's Judicial Branch of Government



Trial courts are in many places in the state, including your county. The Court of Appeals has courtrooms in Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Detroit. It sometimes meets in northern Michigan.



The Michigan Supreme Court meets at the Hall of Justice in downtown Lansing.

Michigan's Judicial Branch of Government – Draw a picture for each type of court – one for each card on the left. Then, cut out the cards and practice matching the court to its responsibility.

Decide cases.



Trial Courts

Was it fair?



Court of Appeals

Final review.



Supreme Court

Glossary – Michigan’s Judicial Branch of Government

Appeal – To ask a court to look at a decision again. The court then decides if it was fair according to the law.

Case – A problem or question that is brought to a court. For example, if neighbors do not agree about a fence, they may take the case to court to decide if it is fair for the fence to be there. The court resolves the dispute by deciding who is right.

Court of Appeals – The second highest court in Michigan. It listens to appeals of trial court decisions. About 7,000 cases go to this level each year.

Courthouse – A court building is sometimes called a courthouse. There are courthouses in every county in Michigan.

Courtroom – A room in a courthouse where courts have trials and other hearings.

Dispute – A disagreement; when people do not agree.

Hearing – A time when information about a case is heard in court.

Interpret – To decide what a law means, if it is fair, and how it applies in a particular case. For example, a judge may interpret a law about telephones to apply to cell phones, too.

Judge – The person in a court case that represents the judicial branch of government. He or she make decisions that interpret and apply laws. In Michigan, judges must be lawyers first. They are elected by the people.

Judicial – Having to do with judges and their decisions.

Judicial Branch of Government – The branch of government that interprets laws. It is led by the Supreme Court.

Jury – Citizens of a community called to make a decision in a case. For example, if someone is accused of a crime, jurors decide if the person is “guilty” or “not guilty.” Serving on a jury is a civic responsibility.

Justice – (1) The title used for a judge of a Supreme Court. (2) A Core Democratic Value having to do with fairness.

Laws – Rules to help keep people safe and know right from wrong. For example, drivers stop at a stop sign because that is the law.

Lawyer – An expert in the law that went to school and passed a test called the bar exam. Lawyers help people solve legal problems. They are sometimes called “attorneys.”

Supreme Court – The highest court. It has the final word on the law.

Trial – A court hearing that ends in a decision about a case.

Trial Court – The type of court where all cases start and most cases finish. In Michigan, trial courts hear about 4,000,000 cases each year. District court, probate court, and circuit court are trial courts in Michigan.

Witness – Someone who has first-hand information about a case who testifies (talks about it) during a trial. For example, a police officer might talk about what she saw when she stopped at a car accident.