

## **Her Day in Court**

### **Women Judges and Justice in Washington State**

#### **Source**

Margaret Fisher at the Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) authored the lesson on behalf of the Washington State Gender and Justice Commission. For more information, contact the Gender and Justice Commission, PO Box 41170, Olympia, Washington 98504-1170, [gender.justice@courts.wa.gov](mailto:gender.justice@courts.wa.gov).

#### **Description**

This lesson explores the history of women in the legal profession in Washington. Students learn vocabulary terms relating to discrimination and then view the DVD and pick out examples of their newly learned vocabulary terms. Discussion following the DVD explores the examples found in the DVD and the coping strategies of women to deal with the barriers presented. Students will examine within their own lives where the money and power are located.

#### **Audience**

High school students in grades 9-12.

#### **Objectives**

At the end of this lesson, students will be better able to:

1. Define vocabulary of sex discrimination.
2. Identify barriers women faced historically in becoming lawyers and judges.
3. Consider what barriers women face today in employment.
4. Chart history of changes for women in law field.
5. Identify strategies women use to become successful.

#### **Time**

One class period (approximately 50 minutes).

#### **Materials**

- Vocabulary of Discrimination Handout.
- *Her Day in Court* DVD (28 min.) available from the Gender and Justice Commission, the Washington State Law Library and the Northwest Women's Law Center.
- Blank Women in the Courts Handout for Document Camera.
- Completed Women in the Courts Handout for Distribution in Class.

#### **Prior to Class**

Make copies for each student of two Handouts: Vocabulary of Discrimination Handout and Completed Women in the Courts Handout.

**Procedures**

1. Begin by asking the class if anyone can give the name of a lawyer or judge from either Washington State or from anywhere in the country. Tell students not to include TV judges or lawyers. Assuming that no one volunteers the name of a woman judge, ask if anyone can think of any woman lawyer or woman judge in Washington State or the entire country. Give them a minute to think. Tell students that while it might have been hard to think of a name, today they are going to learn about the challenges faced by women in the law profession in the history of Washington and today.
2. Tell students before they watch this DVD of the history of women in the law in Washington, they are going to learn some vocabulary terms, so that during the DVD they can pick out examples of these concepts.
3. Pass out the Vocabulary Handout and explain the vocabulary terms to students. Tell them to jot in examples as they watch the DVD.
4. Show the DVD.

**Note**

Students may ask about the judge in the DVD who is not a lawyer. They may be interested in learning that today in jurisdictions of fewer than 5,000 people, the judges do not have to be attorneys. According to the Administrative Office of the Courts, there are now three lay judges in Washington.

5. After the DVD is over, ask students to relate examples from the DVD.
6. Ask students what were the various strategies that the women in the DVD used to react to the difficulties. Write their responses on the board: had a sense of humor, persevered, got support from other women in meetings, developed political base, overcompensated, changed their goal, gave up parts of their personality and adopted male attributes.
7. Use the Timeline Handout for the Document Camera to build a time line with students based on the DVD:

1914 /	1970 /	1979 /	1980 /	1980 /
District Court	Superior Court	US Court of Appeals	WA Court of Appeals	US District Court
1981 /	1983 /	1988 /	1980s /	2009-10 /
Supreme Court	First black woman District Court	First black woman Superior Court	40 women judges in Washington	139 women judges out of 423, 14 women of color

8. Ask students whether they think women face any challenges in the courts in these times. If time permits, put the handout on the document camera of the hierarchy of the courts. Use a pen to fill in the numbers of the number of women judges and women of color,

starting with municipal court. You might indicate the types of cases that each court level hears, since students will generally be unfamiliar with the types of courts. After you have completed this overhead, pass out a copy of the Women in the Courts Handout, which includes additional information than was in the handout.

9. Suggest that students explore on their own time the number of women judges in their superior court, district court, and if applicable, municipal court. They might do a later research project about any woman judge in their area or the state.
10. Ask students to look into their own lives and see whether or not women still face challenges.
11. Invite students to work for justice and equality.

Vocabulary of Discrimination

Write down examples of these concepts as you watch the DVD.

<p><b>Overcompensation</b> – an exaggerated attempt to overcome a feeling of inferiority, guilt, or lower status.</p>	
<p><b>Qualifications</b> – qualities or skills that fit people for a job; at times, qualifications unrelated to job performance were set in order to keep women and other unwanted groups from obtaining a job.</p>	
<p><b>Quota system</b> – a system that requires no more than a minimal number of women/minority/Jewish, etc. applications be selected.</p>	
<p><b>Stereotypes</b> – A set of characteristics given to a group and then to the individual members of that group simply because they belong to that group.</p>	
<p><b>Tokenism</b> – making only a symbolic effort to correct discrimination.</p>	

**Timeline Handout for Document Camera**

**Time Line: Women Judges in Washington**

1914 /	1970 /	1979 /	1980 /	1980 /
District Court	Superior Court	US Court of Appeals	WA Court of Appeals	US District Court
1981 /	1983 /	1988 /	1980s /	2009-2010 /
Supreme Court	First black woman District Court	First black woman Superior Court	40 women judges in Washington	139 of 423 14 women of color

**Women in the Courts Handout for Document Camera**

	<b>First Woman Judge</b>	<b>2010: Women Judges</b>	<b>2009: Women of Color Judges</b>	<b>2010: Total Judges</b>
WASHINGTON SUPREME COURT	1981			
COURT OF APPEALS Division I, Seattle Division II, Tacoma Division III, Spokane	1980			
SUPERIOR COURT	1970			
DISTRICT COURT	1914			
MUNICIPAL COURT				
Totals				

**Women in the Courts Handout**

	<b>First Woman Judge</b>	<b>2010: Women Judges</b>	<b>2009*: Women of Color Judges</b>	<b>2010: Total Judges</b>
<b>WASHINGTON SUPREME COURT</b>	<b>1981</b>	4	0	9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appeals from the Court of Appeals</li> <li>• Administers state court system</li> </ul>				
<b>COURT OF APPEALS</b> Division I, Seattle Division II, Tacoma Division III, Spokane	<b>1980</b>	9	1	20
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appeals from lower courts</li> </ul>				
<b>SUPERIOR COURT</b>	<b>1970</b>	65	6	186
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civil matters</li> <li>• Domestic relations</li> <li>• Felony criminal cases</li> <li>• Juvenile matters</li> <li>• Appeals from lower courts</li> </ul>				
<b>DISTRICT COURT</b>	<b>1914</b>	34	7**	208**
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misdemeanor criminal cases</li> <li>• Criminal traffic, traffic/non-traffic infractions</li> <li>• Domestic violence protection orders</li> <li>• Civil actions of \$50,000 or less</li> <li>• Small claims</li> </ul>				
<b>MUNICIPAL COURT</b>		27		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violations of municipal or city ordinances</li> </ul>				
<b>Totals</b>		<b>139</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>423</b>

\*Most recent numbers available.

\*\*District and municipal court judges are now reported as one group because some district court judges serve in municipal court.