

significant AMERICAN trials



*Your mission should you choose
to accept is . . .*

*to choose one trial significant in
American History. A trial could
be considered significant if:*

*a.) it had a major impact on the
course of American history.*

ex. Dred Scott case

*b.) it resulted in an important
legal precedent or a landmark
Supreme Court decision.*

ex. Gideon v. Wainwright

*c.) it crystallized or generated a
national political controversy.*

ex. Sacco-Vanzetti trial

*d.) the fame of the participants or
the nature of the alleged crime
caused a national sensation.*

*ex. Lindbergh baby
kidnapping*

*e.) the courtroom skills
demonstrated by one or more of
participating lawyers has become
legendary.*

ex. Leopold-Loeb murder trial

*f.) it inspired novelists,
playwrights, screenwriters, non-
fiction writers, and even
songwriters.*

ex. Salem Witch trials

*The trials will be grouped and
focused around a theme and may
be used by only one person.*

✘ Trials have shaped American History ✘

Trials have been the ultimate means to resolve disputes in American society from Colonial times to the present. Many of the great turning points in the nation's history have occurred in courtrooms - from John Peter Zenger's trial for allegedly libeling the British governor of colonial New York through Roe v. Wade, which barred states from prohibiting abortions in the early months of pregnancy.

Trials have been a prime source of popular entertainment, public ritual, and real-life drama. As compelling as trials may be as drama, they fill a far more serious purpose in our society; they offer a mechanism for maintaining public order when one person, or other legal entity such as a corporation, violates the legally protected rights of another person or society at large. In this sense, a trial fulfills the human need for retribution, providing even the losing side with a sense that he or she at least has had an opportunity to air grievances, or has had his or her "day in court."

Perhaps the most important factor about a court is that it is a public body. In each case, a court must determine the facts, but in determining their legal significance, the court is performing a service not just to the litigants, but to the larger community as well. In deciding a particular controversy according to the law, courts provide guidance to others who may in the future confront similar issues, thereby ideally forestalling at least some potential litigation.

This evolutionary method of devising so-called judge-made law - as opposed to legislation - is a natural by-product of

common-law systems of jurisprudence like ours, in which current cases are decided in accordance with precepts derived from earlier cases. This "common law" is a body of complex rules formulated by generations of judges, beginning in England during the Middle Ages.

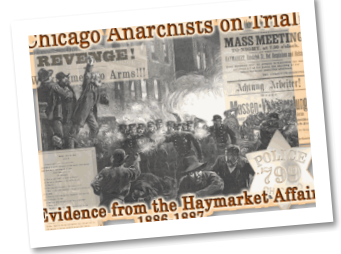
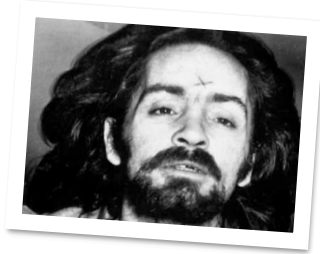
"Civil law," by contrast, grew out of a written code of Roman laws. Although today the number of statutes regulating both public, or criminal, law (in which the government has the most direct interest) and private, or civil, law (directly involving the interests of individuals) continues to grow, the common-law system

predominates our nation.

These trials illuminate trial procedures, rules of evidence, appeals procedures, as well as are representative of periods of American history. Perhaps the most significant thing that can be learned by studying these trials is that while the law is constantly changing it remains rooted to principles that are older than our nation.

Taken from Great American Trials edited by Edward W. Knappman





Significant Trials Project Components

Students will develop a presentation around a theme that emerges from the selected trials. The purpose of the presentation is educate about the legal theme or law related issue in a manner which involves the audience in a better understanding about how law has evolved throughout American

history and how trials have helped shape and explain the law and American political and social history. This is not a report on the two trials, but an investigation of important issues that emerge through significant trials and a better understanding of how America has evolved.



DATE _____
Visual and
Reflection ? Draft

ORAL PRESENTATION 100 PTS

Presentations will be about 15-20 minutes in length and may be joined with other presenters when similar issues are being explored. After the initial research on the individual trials students will work on creating an

DATE _____
Visual and
Reflection ? Final

DATE _____
Presentation

DATE _____
Exam

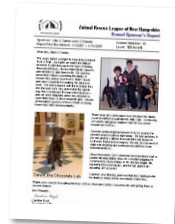


activity which educates the theme or issue. Students will also be presenting a question for reflection at the end of their presentation which will allow the audience to reflect on what they have been taught.

as well to make up the missed presentation. Please provide Lehnhart with relevant information and graphics needed to complete the visual.

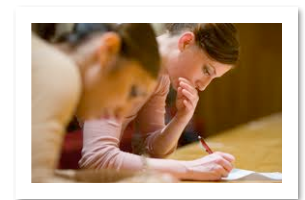
REFLECTIONS & TEST 100 PTS

The Visual will be used to track presentations, reflect on the issues presented, and prepare for the exam at the culmination of all the presentations. Each day



VISUAL 0 PTS

Each group's presentation will have an accompanying visual which will educate about the trials, identify the important points being presented regarding the theme, and explain the activity undertaken. It will be used by absent students



following a presentation we will begin with the reflections and presenters will be able to see what fellow students learned.