



GAME GUIDE



FOR TEACHERS

Welcome to *Argument Wars*: Our Courts' answer to teaching those landmark Supreme Court cases that can make for some difficult (or bone dry) lessons. But *Argument Wars* doesn't just give students an introduction to a few cases. When you have your class play *Argument Wars*, you are helping your students develop valuable critical thinking skills as they evaluate support for key arguments in each case.

WHAT IS ARGUMENT WARS?

Argument Wars is a video game that teaches students about landmark Supreme Court cases that clarified key constitutional rights, including:

- *Brown v. Board of Education* (14th Amendment right to equal education)
- *New Jersey v. TLO* (4th Amendment right against illegal searches at school)
- *Miranda v. Arizona* (5th Amendment right to remain silent)
- *Texas v. Johnson* (1st Amendment freedom of expression as it pertains to flag burning)
- *Gideon v. Wainwright* * (6th Amendment right to counsel and 14th Amendment right to due process in criminal trials in state courts)

Each case is a separate game within *Argument Wars*, so you can choose to have your class learn as many or as few of the cases as your curriculum requires. In each game, students play a lawyer who represents one side in the case. Students identify the main argument in favor of the side they represent, then back up that argument by evaluating a variety of possible supporting statements. Students must correctly choose the best supporting statements to help their side, and must be prepared to satisfy the judge by showing that they understand how the support relates to their main argument. At the same time, students must also evaluate the arguments and supports offered by their computer-generated opponent, who represents the opposite side in the case.

* Note that this game is more difficult than the others because there are two arguments

WHAT DO MY STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW BEFORE THEY PLAY ARGUMENT WARS?

You do not need to pre-teach the landmark cases before your class plays *Argument Wars*. The beauty of using a video game as a teaching tool is that learning the game means learning the material. *Argument Wars* gives students the facts they need about each case. That said, students will get more out of *Argument Wars* if they are familiar with the rights contained in the Bill of Rights and other amendments, and if they understand that, over the decades, the Supreme Court has had to interpret vague constitutional language to decide the limits of those rights. We recommend having students play the Our Courts game *Do I Have A Right?* and teaching the Our Courts lesson *Interpreting the Constitution: What Does That Mean?* before your class plays *Argument Wars*. In addition, we recommend starting the class with the *New Jersey v. T.L.O.* game within *Argument Wars*.

NO SURPRISES, PLEASE: WHAT HAPPENS DURING ARGUMENT WARS?

First, students choose a character for themselves. They assign that character their own first name.

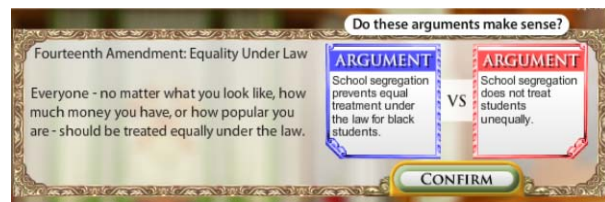
- ☞ *Make sure students use their real names if you plan to have them print a game report at the end.*



Next, students learn about the case as their character and the opposing counsel engage in a dialogue with the judge. Their character begins by explaining the nature of the problem according to the point of view of the side they represent. Afterward, the computer-generated opposing counsel explains the issue from the point of view of the other side of the case.

- ☞ *Make sure students read the explanations in each dialogue bubble. If they skip through, they will not understand what the case is about.*

After students have worked through the initial dialogues, they must then identify which Constitutional amendment is at issue in the case. Students do *not* need to know the amendments in advance because the game offers a limited range of choices and explains what rights each amendment gives. Students must then confirm that the amendment they chose resulted in arguments that make sense in this case.



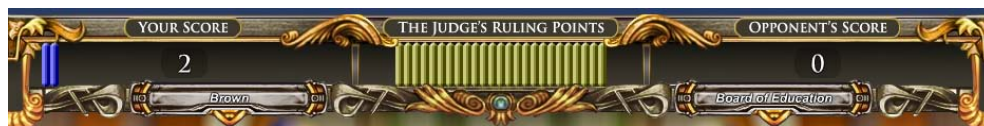
If students need a reminder about the case, they can click "Read More." This brings up a short summary of the case.

Now the argument war begins! On the next screen, the “Pitch” appears. In the center of the Pitch, students will see the two opposing arguments:



The Pitch is like a sliding scale or balance. During the game, students will drag supporting arguments to the Pitch and place them beside their main argument. The computer-generated opponent does the same. The balance slides back and forth depending on which side has more support for its main argument.

The points students earn during the game appear at the top of the screen. There are a limited number of points available. These appear center top and are called the “Judge’s Ruling Points.” When all points have been distributed, the game ends.



Before the “war” can start, students must draw cards. When they do, the game deals three “support cards.” Each card contains possible support for the main argument. The challenge is to read the cards and play the cards that best support the main argument. Students must decide which cards to play and which cards to avoid. If students decide that a card does not support the argument well enough, they can discard it.



To begin, students click on a card to read it. Students should read all three cards before deciding which one to play. When they decide to play a card, they drag the card up to the “Pitch” and drop it next to their main argument. The cards will be labeled as ideas, facts, Supreme Court cases, or constitutional language.

- ☞ *Not all support is the same! Generally, ideas are the worst, and Supreme Court cases and constitutional language are the best. Some of the support cards contain supporting arguments that will NOT work, such as people’s opinions and cards that don’t support the main argument.*
- ☞ *Students should learn that relevant Supreme Court cases (or precedent) and constitutional language are usually the strongest support for an argument.*

After students play a support card, the judge will respond to their choice. If they chose a good support for the main argument, the judge will respond favorably and may ask to hear more. This takes students to a special screen where they must demonstrate that they can make a connection between the support and the main argument. They do this by constructing a sentence on a sentence-matching wheel.



If they chose a bad support for the main argument, the opponent may object, in which case the card will be knocked off the Pitch. The judge will explain why that support was no good.

Next, it is the opponent's turn. The computer-generated opponent plays a support card and drops it on the opposing side of the Pitch. Students must read the card the opponent played and decide whether the opponent's card is a good support for the *opponent's* argument.

☞ *It is important that students judge opposing support not based on whether they agree with it, but based on whether it supports the opposite argument.*



If students decide the support is good, they make a choice to “pass” (do nothing). If the support is weak, students may “object.” If students object, the judge will either sustain or overrule the objection. The judge will also explain his decision.

The game proceeds as students exchange turns with the opponent. Students continue to evaluate the cards and either play or discard them. They also continue to evaluate the opponent's support cards. When all points have been awarded, the judge ends the game.



Students win the game (and the case) if they win more points than the opponent. At the end of the game, a screen appears with a summary of the decision in the actual Supreme Court case. There are also links to learn more about the real case.

From this screen, students can either quit or try the game again. They can also print a certificate summarizing how they fared in the game.

The certificate allows you to keep a tangible record of students' participation in the game and to track students' progress. This certificate can be used to assign students a grade for playing the game.

