

Carl Holland

**Level:** B2+

**Targeted Skills:** research and investigation in English (reading, listening), rhetoric of explanation, questioning and persuasion (speaking), briefing notes and summaries (writing).

### Overview

Whether it be the almost sacred reverence bestowed on the Constitution, the life-changing impact of Supreme Court decisions, civil law suits worth millions or the sentences imposed on daytime TV by Judge Judy, law and the judiciary is ever-present in US culture. After a brief overview of the judicial system, we will be focusing on several high-profile trials that captured the imagination and moral heartbeat of the US, and sometimes incited indignation or a sense of triumph the whole world over. Cases such as the Scopes 'Monkey' Trial that prosecuted an Alabama high-school teacher for teaching evolution; the trial of the Rosenbergs for treason in the midst of the Cold War, accused of helping the Soviets access the secrets of Atomic energy; the notorious murder trial of the hugely famous US footballer, O.J. Simpson, on the charges of killing his wife and a male friend, that dominated TV news for over a year in the 1990s. We will explore the trials themselves through a rich array of both primary and secondary sources: transcripts of court proceedings, press reports at the time and/or TV news reports, extracts from novels or written works, such as Truman Capote's true-crime book *In Cold Blood*, songs, films or other artworks. We will also consider them both in their historical context and in relation to current debates.

### Methodology

In addition to the wide range of source material we will be looking at, courtroom procedures – cross-examination, arguments for the defense and prosecution, the judge's summing up, the deliberation of the jury – all offer great possibilities for speaking and writing English. In class, we will be setting up our own special Appeals Court to re-consider the evidence presented to the jury and the decisions they came to. Students will be tasked with researching a particular case and practicing their oratory skills during short reconstitutions and subsequent debates.

### Grading

- ◆ Class project: small groups will research and reconstitute a famous trial
- ◆ Individual exam (written and/or oral) based on the whole module
- ◆ Investment in the course – doing all pre-class work as well as participating actively in class discussions and exercises – will also count towards the final grade.

Exact weighting to be defined.