

Young Portrait Explorers:

The Four Justices

Learning Objective: Learn about the four women justices who have served on the Supreme Court (the highest or most important court of law in the United States).

Portrait Discussion:

Spend 30 seconds letting your eyes wander from the top of the painting to the bottom.



Clothing: Take a look at the clothing worn by the four women in this portrait. Notice the color and style. How are their clothes similar? What differences can you spot in their clothing? All four women are wearing long, black robes, and each of them has a different **jabot** (the white ruffle or frill at their necks). Can you think of other jobs that require a specific uniform? These women are Supreme Court **justices** (or judges who interpret the law). First assembled in 1790, the Supreme Court has had only four women justices (out of 114). All four women justices are pictured in this portrait. Clockwise from bottom right: Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sandra Day O'Connor, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan.

Pose: In this portrait, the pose of each justice can tell us how they might feel toward the others. Can you pose like one of the standing justices? Sonia Sotomayor, the justice standing on the left, is standing tall with her eyes looking directly at us. Do you think she looks confident or determined? What else is she doing with her body? Sonia Sotomayor also has her hand placed on the couch while her body is turned toward Elena Kagan. Can you pose like Sonia Sotomayor? What is she doing to show her respect or admiration for the other justices? How do you show someone you respect them? Sometimes people show respect to others by giving up their seat to someone else. For example, on a bus that is full of people, it is common to find young people giving up their seats to older people. In this portrait, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan are standing, showing their respect for the two seated justices, Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg – the first two women justices **appointed** (or assigned) to the Supreme Court.

Setting: What objects can you see inside the room? Can you spot all of the books? There are books on the couch, and also in a cabinet reflected in the mirror. Do you like to read? Supreme Court justices read a lot of books and study many different topics to make sure their decisions are informed. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, for example, read and studied for many years so she could help advance and support women's rights to fair pay and access to equal education. What other objects can you spot through the large window? Can you see the other tall windows and columns that make up a **courtyard** (or unroofed area enclosed by the walls of a building)? In this portrait we can actually see the inside and the outside of this building at the same time! The setting is based on the Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C.

Historical Context: Artist Nelson Shanks created this portrait to recognize the accomplishments of these four women justices. Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman justice to serve on the Supreme Court in 1981. Ruth Bader Ginsburg was the first Jewish woman on the court and fought tirelessly for women's rights. Sonia Sotomayor's historic appointment, in 2009, made her the first Hispanic Supreme Court justice. And Elena Kagan, who became the newest women justice on the Supreme court in 2010, continues to build a path for future female justices. All of these women have made history. Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan still serve on the Court today.

Related Children's Books:

I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark by Debbie Levy

Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You! by Sonia Sotomayor

Sonia Sotomayor: A Judge Grows in the Bronx by Jonah Winter

Activity: Making Jabots

Materials: Colorful construction paper, markers & glue.

Instructions: Justices wear jabots as part of their judge's uniform. Often, jabots express a justice's personality. Ruth Bader Ginsburg was known for

wearing certain jabots for different rulings and decisions. Take a look at the jabots in the portrait. What would your jabot look like? Crumple or fold the construction paper to create a 3D base for your jabot and add additional designs with markers.



The Four Justices by Nelson Shanks, oil on canvas, 2012. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution;
Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming. © Estate of Nelson Shanks
Clockwise from bottom right: Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sandra Day O'Connor, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan
Find the portrait on our website, here: https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.2020.130