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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2004 Volume I: The Supreme Court in American Political History

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## The Supreme Court and American Society: The Dred Scott Case

Guide for Curriculum Unit 04.01.02  
by John Buell

The *Dred Scott* decision has long played an important role in the U.S. History Curriculum. The case helps to define in stark terms the conflicts over race and slavery that were leading the country into civil war. It also represents a chance to consider the Supreme Court and its role in American society. Despite its great importance in government and society, the Court is a mystery to most high school students. This unit explores the legal and political issues behind *Dred Scott*, the legal arguments of the case and the public response to the case. It also looks at a case from recent years in which the Court also played a role in a divisive political conflict. Students will find that many issues concerning the proper way for the Court to wield its considerable power are still with us. Students will learn the identities and political leanings of the current members of the present day Court and draw parallels between it and the one that decided *Dred Scott*.

(Recommended for U.S History and Civics, grades 10-12.)

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