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Sonia Joins the Supreme Court



Written by Cynthia Kennedy Hanzel

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Sonia, age 6 or 7 above, grew up in the Bronx neighborhood of New York City.

A Big Dream

Sonia Sotomayor dreamed of becoming a detective when she was a girl. Doctors told her when she was eight that she had Type 1 **diabetes**. She had to learn to take good care of herself because this is a serious disease. Doctors told her that she should not be a detective. Sonia changed her dream. She began to dream of becoming a **lawyer** instead.



Sonia visits the high school she attended to talk to students about their career goals.

Sonia had to try her best to make her dream of being a lawyer come true. Her parents moved to New York from Puerto Rico. They did not have much money to help her pay for school. Sonia's father died when she was nine. Her mother worked more than one job to support Sonia and her brother.

Sonia studied hard in school. She tried to be the best student she could be. She made good grades and won many awards. She won scholarships, or money for school, to attend Princeton University and then Yale Law School. She was an excellent student at both schools.



President George H. W. Bush nominated Sonia Sotomayor to be a federal judge in 1991. President Bill Clinton nominated her for a higher federal judge job in 1998.

The Dream Comes True

After graduating from law school, Sonia got her first job as a lawyer. Her dream had come true. After several years as a lawyer her dream changed again. She dreamed of becoming a judge. Her dream to become a judge came true in 1991.

In May 2009, President Barack Obama had to choose a new justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. One of the justices, David H. Souter, was retiring. The president announced Judge Sotomayor was his choice to



Justice David H. Souter retired from the Supreme Court in summer 2009.

replace Justice Souter. The president said she had done a great job as a judge and would be a wise justice.

Do You Know?

Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court are very important. They decide if laws follow the U.S. Constitution. The Constitution is the country's set of rules and laws that protect our rights. The nine justices of the Supreme Court make decisions that affect many people.

Picking a New Justice

Presidents often choose a justice who agrees with them on important ideas. All U.S. Supreme Court justices have worked as lawyers. Many justices have not been judges in other courts, as Sonia has.

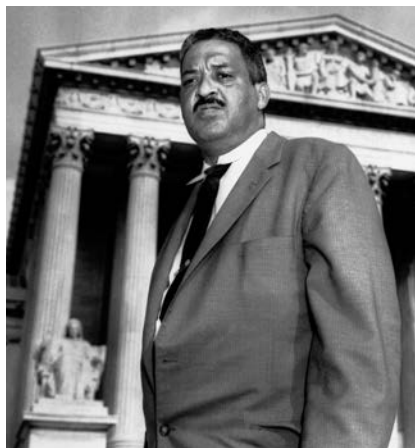
A justice can be any age. The youngest justice was 32 when chosen. The oldest was 65 when chosen. Presidents often choose a younger person so he or she can work on the court for many years. Sonia was 55 when President Obama chose her.



Thurgood Marshall, center, helped end segregation in schools as a lawyer in 1954. He became a Supreme Court justice in 1967.

The Supreme Court is over two hundred years old. For most of that time all of the justices on the Court were white men. Yet the justices make

decisions that affect all kinds of people in different areas of the country. Some presidents now try to make the court more **representative** of the country. Thurgood Marshall joined the court as its first African American justice in 1967. Sandra Day O'Connor joined the court as its first female justice in 1981.



Justice Thurgood Marshall was the first African American justice on the Supreme court.



Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was the first female justice.

Finding the Right Person

President Obama, like other presidents before him, asked for help to find the best justice. Lawyers and **advisers** to the president made a list of people who would make good justices. They checked to make sure the people on the list were fair and followed the law.

Sonia Sotomayor was on the list. She had been a lawyer and judge for many years. She would be

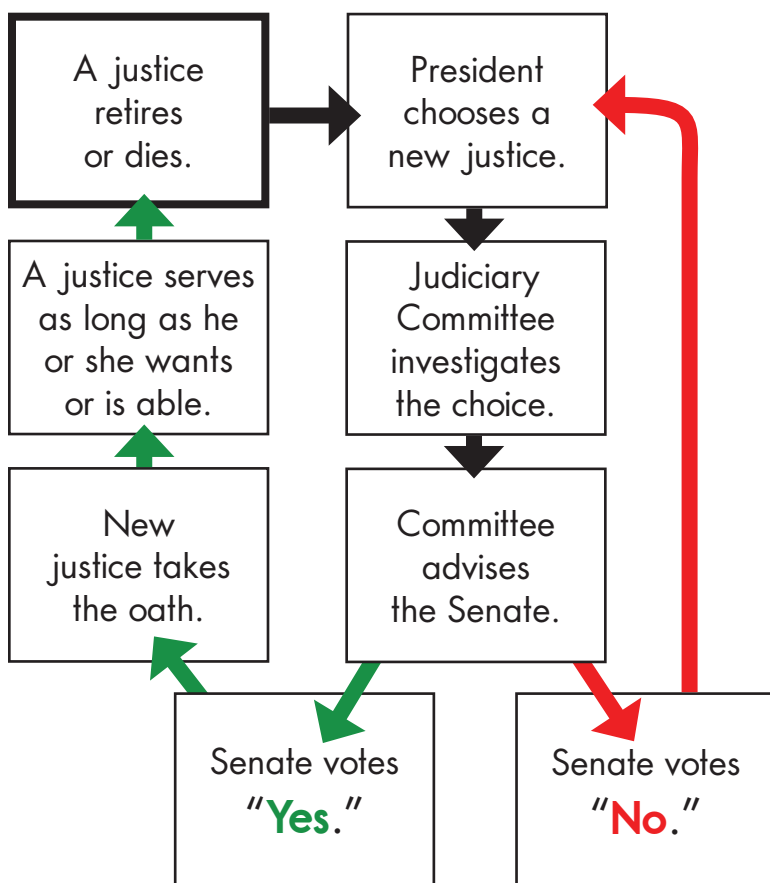
the third woman ever to be a Supreme Court justice. Sonia would join Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the second woman on the court. Judge Sotomayor would be the first Latina and the first person with diabetes to be chosen as a justice.



Ruth Bader Ginsburg is the only other woman on the Supreme Court in 2009.

After President Obama talked to Judge Sotomayor, he picked her to be a justice. However, the president doesn't decide who becomes a justice on his own. A **majority** of the U.S. Senate must agree with his choice.

A Change in the Supreme Court





Sonia answered many questions about herself and how she did her job as a judge in front of a roomful of people.

The Judiciary Committee

A group of senators called the Judiciary Committee **investigated** Sonia. She answered the senators' questions about decisions she had made as a judge. She talked about things she had said in speeches. Sonia talked about how she would be fair when deciding **cases** in the future.

The committee reported its findings to the rest of the Senate. The president would have to choose someone else if the Senate did not **confirm** Judge Sotomayor.

The Senate Votes

Some people who disagreed with President Obama's ideas also disagreed with choosing Judge Sotomayor. But when the Senate voted on August 6, 2009, the majority voted to confirm Judge Sotomayor.

Two days later Sonia Sotomayor took an oath, or made a promise, to follow the Constitution. She was now the 111th justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.



Sonia Sotomayor was sworn in by Chief Justice John Roberts.

The Job of the New Justice

Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor has an office in the Supreme Court Building. She had to hire people to work in her office. She also had to learn the rules of the Supreme Court just as you would learn the rules at a new school. Sonia's main job is now to listen to cases that are brought to the Supreme Court and to make wise decisions.



Sonia said President Obama gave her "the most humbling honor" of her life by asking her to be a justice.



The justices of the Supreme Court with President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden in September 2009. From left to right justices: Samuel A. Alito, Jr., Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Anthony Kennedy, John Paul Stevens, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., President Obama, Sonia Sotomayor, Vice President Biden, Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas, and Stephen G. Breyer.

Conclusion

Justice Sotomayor has made many dreams in her life come true. Being a justice is a very important job. Most presidents only get to choose one or two Supreme Court justices during their time in office. It is a very important decision. Justice Sotomayor will try to be the best justice she can be. She could make decisions that affect all of us for twenty or thirty years, or maybe even longer!

Glossary:

advisers (<i>n.</i>)	people who offer advice about decisions (p. 10)
cases (<i>n.</i>)	situations acted upon in law (p. 12)
confirm (<i>v.</i>)	to approve (p. 12)
diabetes (<i>n.</i>)	a medical disorder that causes excessive thirst and the production of a large amount of urine (p. 4)
investigated (<i>v.</i>)	to have tried to have found out about something (p. 12)
lawyer (<i>n.</i>)	a person whose job is to give advice about the law or represent people in court (p. 4)
majority (<i>n.</i>)	more than half of something (p. 11)
representative (<i>adj.</i>)	serving as a symbol or acting for another (p. 9)

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Front cover: Sonia Sotomayor speaks during Judiciary Committee hearings in 2009.

Back cover: Supreme Court Building, Washington DC

Title page: Sonia Sotomayor with Nevada Senator Harry Reid

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