

# Who Is Ruth Bader Ginsburg?

- A baton-twirling teenager who performed at school football games
- The second woman appointed to the US Supreme Court
- A tireless fighter for gender equality and civil rights
- ✓ **All of the above!**

*Find out more in this illustrated book!*

YOUR  
HEADQUARTERS  
FOR HISTORY



Who? What? Where?

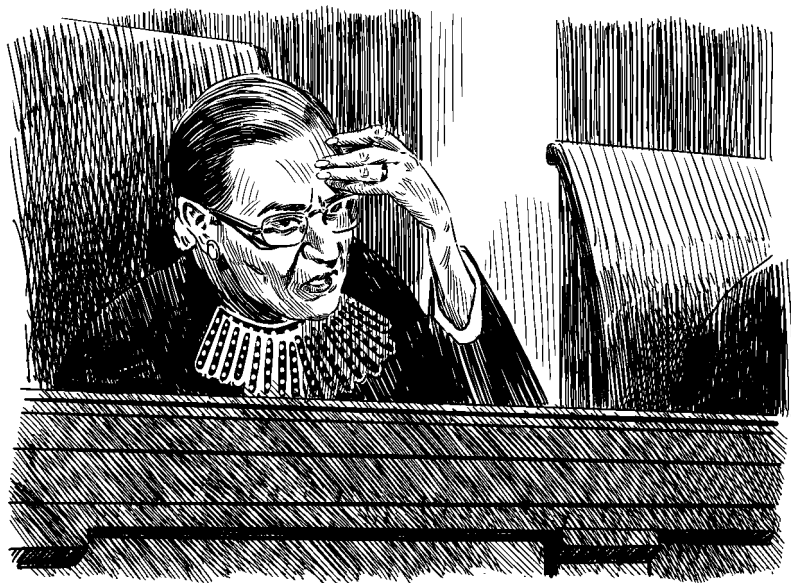
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# Who Is Ruth Bader Ginsburg?



by Patricia Brennan Demuth  
illustrated by Jake Murray

Penguin Workshop

For Ileah Brennan, a reading wonder,  
and her talented mom, Megan, Esq.  
You make our world shine—PBD

For my sister, Sara—JM

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## Who Is Ruth Bader Ginsburg?

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Like every kid, Ruth always looked forward to her birthday. When the special day came along, she and her mother loaded up bags of ice cream. Then they brought the treats to the place where Ruth celebrated all her birthdays. It wasn't filled with balloons or wrapped presents. It was at a nearby orphanage—a home for children who didn't have parents.

Sometimes Ruth wished for birthday parties like her friends had. But the smiles on the children always changed her mind.

Life wasn't always easy for Ruth's family, either. Her parents were hardworking immigrants. They rented an apartment in Brooklyn, New York. But Ruth's mother taught her to care for others who had even less. It made Ruth want to “do

something” when she grew up—something to change people’s lives.

But how could a girl make a big difference? When Ruth was a child, girls faced lots of closed doors. Back then, there were *policemen*, *mailmen*, and *firemen*. Doctors, dentists, pilots, lawyers, soldiers—nearly all were male.

Ruth never dreamed that one day she’d beat the odds and become a lawyer. But that’s what she did. And it was just the beginning.

Ruth was tiny, soft-spoken, and always polite. Yet when it came to standing up for people’s rights, she was a warrior. She fought to change laws to give women an equal chance in society.

One by one, she opened doors. Then she walked right through many of those open doors herself—all the way to the Supreme Court!

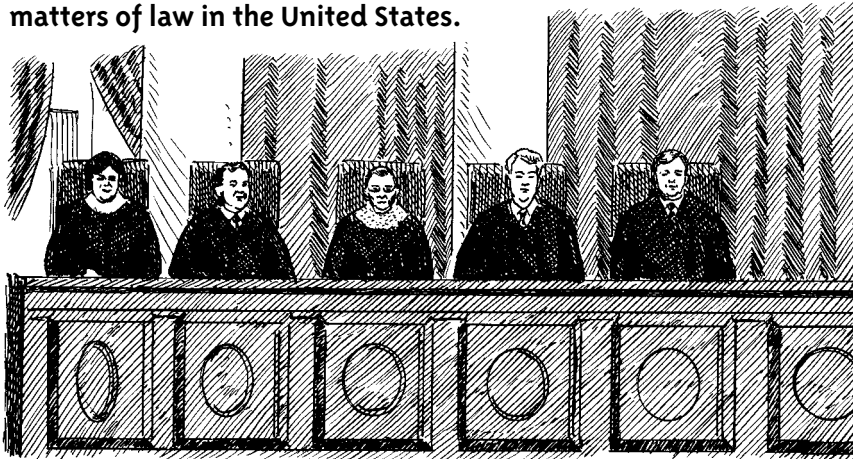
Today, Ruth Bader Ginsburg is so famous that millions know her just from her initials: RBG.



## What Is the Supreme Court?

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The Supreme Court sits in Washington, DC, our nation's capital. It's part of the judicial branch of government. The other two branches are the legislative branch (Congress) and the executive branch (which includes the president). A group of nine judges, called justices, sit on the Court. There are no juries. The justices have the final say on matters of law in the United States.

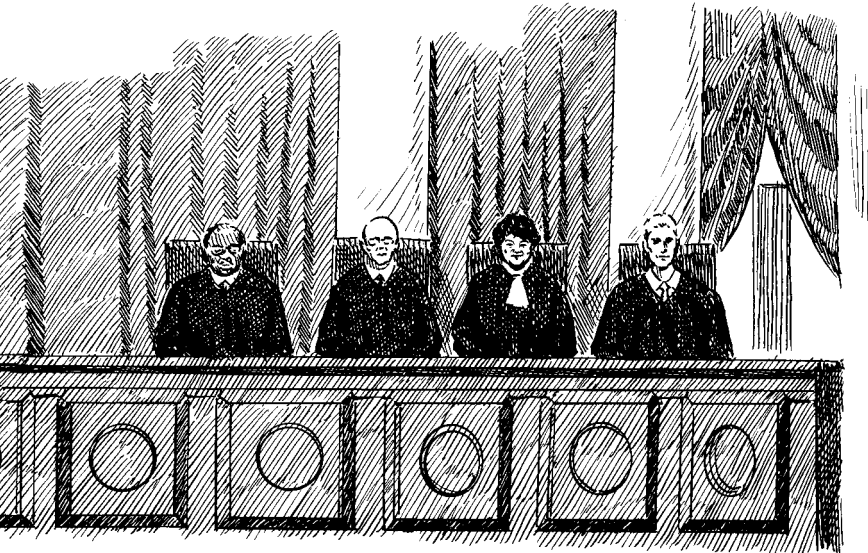


From left to right:  
Elena Kagan, Samuel A. Alito Jr., Ruth Bader Ginsburg,  
Brett M. Kavanaugh, John G. Roberts Jr. (Chief Justice)



The framers of the Constitution wanted the Supreme Court to be independent of politics. So justices are allowed to hold their jobs for life. They can't be removed for making unpopular decisions.

The Supreme Court has a big job to do. It makes sure the Constitution is followed by Congress, the president, and all fifty states. Its decisions affect the lives of all Americans.



Clarence Thomas, Stephen G. Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor,  
Neil M. Gorsuch

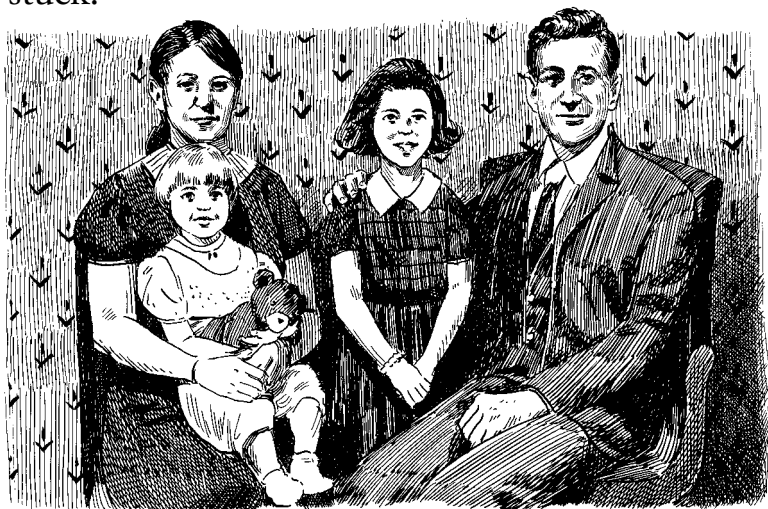
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## CHAPTER 1

### An Immigrant Family

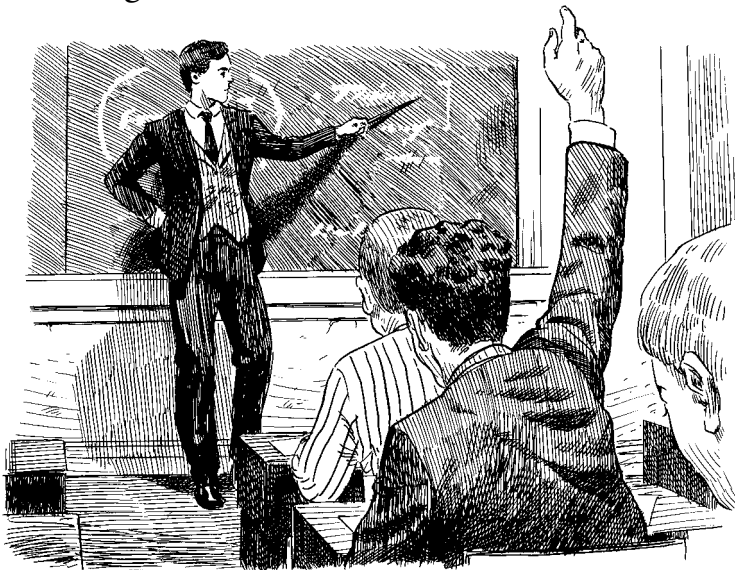
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The future judge known as RBG was born a frisky baby on March 15, 1933. Her birth name was Joan Ruth Bader. But as a baby, she kicked so much that her big sister, Marilyn, nicknamed her Kiki (say: KICK-ee). Later, at school, she started going by her middle name because there were so many Joans in her class. Ruth was the name that stuck.



Ruth grew up in Brooklyn, a bustling part of New York City. She lived with her parents, Nathan and Celia Bader, on the bottom floor of a two-family house. Their landlady lived right above them. Their block was filled with hardworking immigrant families like theirs.

Ruth's shy, gentle father had been born in Ukraine (near Russia). Nathan was forbidden from going to school there because he was Jewish. In the United States, he went to night school to learn English and become a citizen.



Ruth's mother, Celia, was born in America just months after her family arrived from Poland. They were also fleeing because they were Jewish. Young Ruth learned early from her parents to treasure America's freedoms.

Like the other fathers in the neighborhood, Nathan Bader left for work each morning. Nathan made a living selling fur hats and coats.



But in the 1930s, during the Great Depression, most Americans were too broke to afford them. Nathan had to work late just to make ends meet.

Celia stayed home to raise her two daughters. Sadly, when Ruth was two, her six-year-old sister died. After that, Celia pinned all her hopes on little Ruth.



## Immigrants in New York City

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Millions of immigrants flooded into the United States at the beginning of the 1900s. Terrible hardships, including religious prejudice, drove most immigrants to leave their homelands. About one-third of the newcomers stayed right in New York, where they first landed at Ellis Island.



Ellis Island



At that time, most mothers hoped their daughters would grow up to marry some Prince Charming. Not Celia. She believed in women's rights. As a young woman, she had marched in a parade to get women the right to vote. She raised her daughter to be independent. More than anything, she wanted Ruth to get a good education.

Celia had been a brilliant student herself. She graduated from high school at age fifteen! She dreamed of going to college. But Celia's father thought college was wasted on a girl. So Celia took an office job instead. Every week, she handed over money to help her older brother attend college. Now, as a mother, she passed along a love of books and learning to her daughter. Ruth's earliest memory was of sitting on her mother's lap while Celia read to her.

Ruth became a good student like her mother. Sometimes, though, she felt a lot of pressure.





One time, her report card showed a poor grade. Her mother looked so disappointed. Ruth made up her mind to get straight As from then on. And she did.

Life wasn't all about studying, though. Not by any means. Outdoors, the kids on the block played in a pack. Jumping rope was the rage with

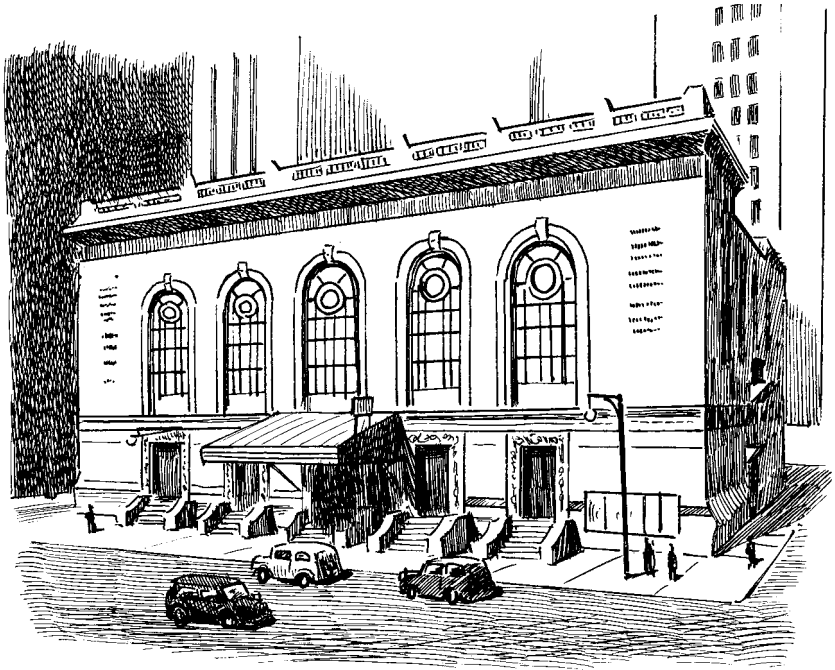
girls then. Ruth could jump double dutch, quickly stepping in and out of two long ropes swinging in opposite directions. Some days, she explored the neighborhood on her roller skates.



One day Ruth watched five boys from the block leaping from one garage roof to another. That looked fun and daring! Jumping roofs wasn't at all "ladylike." But that didn't stop lively Ruth from joining in.



As a child, Ruth also found a passion for the arts. Her “dream place” was the Brooklyn Academy of Music, just a subway ride away. Every Saturday,

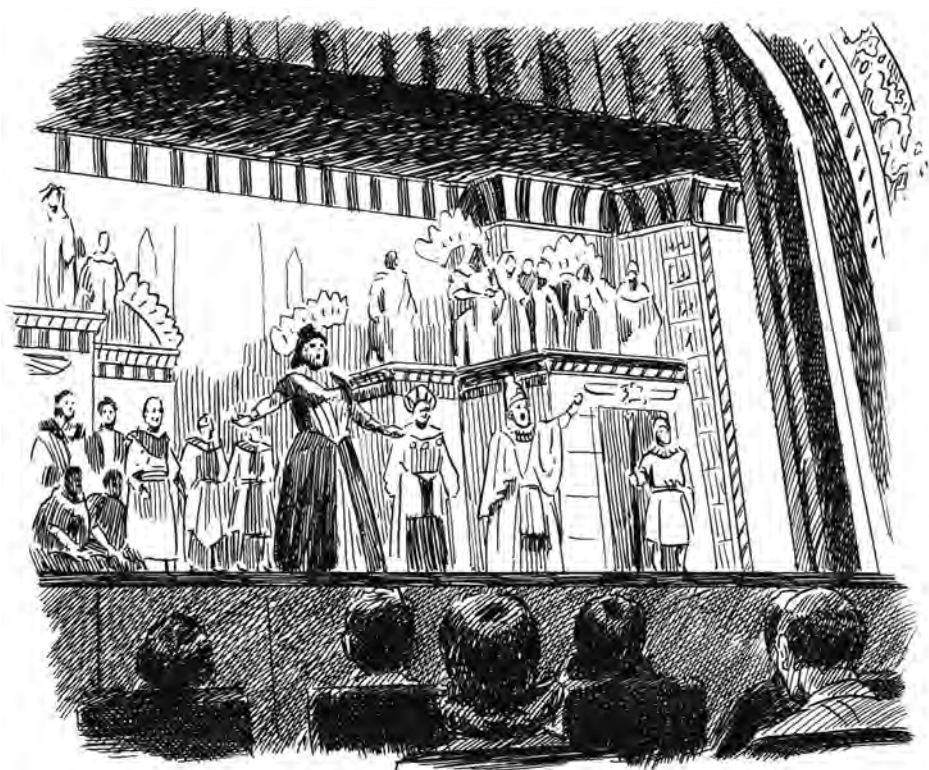


Brooklyn Academy of Music, 1930s

her mother took her to see children's theater there. With her class, Ruth went on school trips to see the art collection at the Brooklyn Museum.

When Ruth turned eleven, her mother took her to her first opera. Opera is like a play, only all the parts are sung. Ruth thought it was magnificent! The soaring voices, the music, the costumes, the

drama—it all thrilled her. She dreamed of being an opera star. But her voice was so bad that her teacher asked Ruth not to sing out loud in chorus!



Once a week, Celia dropped Ruth off at the library while she got her hair done. Ruth curled up in a chair and read stories of daring women.



Her favorites were the Nancy Drew mysteries starring a smart, independent girl detective. The real-life story of Amelia Earhart, a famous pilot,



Amelia Earhart

fired her imagination, too. Right below the library was a Chinese restaurant. Delicious smells drifted up while Ruth lost herself in reading. From then on, the smells of soy sauce and egg rolls reminded Ruth of books.

In 1945, when Ruth was twelve, World War II ended with Germany's defeat. Adolf Hitler's plan had been to rule all of Europe and wipe out the Jews. As a Jewish girl, Ruth was very aware that

Jews were being killed by Hitler's forces. Her own family was safe in America. Yet even in the United States, there was prejudice.

On a trip to Pennsylvania, Ruth spotted a sign outside a hotel: NO DOGS OR JEWS ALLOWED, it read. Many years later, when she was a judge, Ruth would tell the US Senate about the sting of those words.



## A Woman's Right to Vote

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For decades, women in the United States worked hard to win the right to vote. But it wasn't until 1920 that an amendment—or change—to the United States Constitution made it a law that women would be allowed to vote. Since women make up more than half of the US population today, their votes can determine the outcome of many elections.