

DNA Fingerprint Analysis in Courts

A significant advance in criminal investigation has been the use of DNA evidence to help convict criminals, exonerate the innocent, and determine the identity of a Jane or John Doe. DNA evidence has been widely used in court proceedings since the 1990s.

Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), like a fingerprint, is unique to the individual, with the exception of identical twins. DNA evidence can be obtained from bodily fluids, hair, fingernails, and bones left at the scene of the crime, and can be helpful in establishing a link between a suspect and a crime when there are no witnesses to the crime.

Further Discussion DNA may be unique to an individual, but that does not make it the magic bullet of criminal detection. DNA samples collected at a crime scene are usually small and used up in the forensics process. This means that if DNA results are contested (claimed to be contaminated, for example), forensics scientists cannot go back to original samples and redo the tests.

Activity: Mock Trial In *People v. Castro*, Jose Castro was accused of murdering his neighbor and her small daughter. A bloodstain on Castro's watch was matched to the victim. But should the DNA results be accepted as evidence of his guilt? Select students to represent prosecution and defense, either supporting or refuting the use of DNA evidence to convict Castro. The class should hold a vote after the arguments.