

School Segregation

Overview

While the 1890 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* further entrenched segregation throughout the south with its upholding of “separate but equal,” civil rights groups argued that racially segregated schools were inherently unequal, challenging such injustice via protests, court cases, boycotts, etc. In this lesson, students will explore the history of segregated schools and explore the give and take that occurred throughout history in the fight regarding segregation and integration through a Power Point discussion, examination of primary source images, and reading. Throughout the lesson, students will learn about monumental events and people related to school segregation, such as the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the “Little Rock Nine,” Ruby Bridges, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and more. Students will further gain an understanding that regardless of the Brown ruling and legislation such as the Civil Rights Act, making integration a reality took years of struggle. The lesson will culminate with students exploring North Carolina’s pro-segregation Pearsall Plan, for which they will write a speech advocating against.

Grade

8

NC Essential Standards for 8th Grade Social Studies

- 8.H.1: Apply historical thinking to understand the creation and development of North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.2.1: Explain the impact of economic, political, social, and military conflicts (e.g. war, slavery, states’ rights and citizenship and immigration policies) on the development of North Carolina and the United States
- 8.H.2.2: Summarize how leadership and citizen actions influenced the outcome of key conflicts in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.3.3: Explain how individuals and groups have influenced economic, political and social change in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.C&G.1.4: Analyze access to democratic rights and freedoms among various groups in North Carolina and the United States
- 8.C&G.2.1: Evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches used to effect change in North Carolina and the United States
- 8.C&G.2.2: Analyze issues pursued through active citizen campaigns for change
- 8.C&G.2.3: Explain the impact of human and civil rights issues throughout North Carolina and United States history
- 8.C.1.3: Summarize the contributions of particular groups to the development of North Carolina and the United States

Essential Questions

- What was segregation, and how did it affect North Carolina’s schools and students?
- Why is “separate but equal” unconstitutional?
- What happened in the case of *Brown v. BOE*, and how did its ruling affect school segregation?
- Evaluate various state responses to integration.
- What role did students such as the “Little Rock Nine” and Ruby Bridges play during integration?
- What was the Pearsall Plan and how did it affect school integration in North Carolina?
- What was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and how did this act contradict the Pearsall Plan?

- How did active, engaged community members work to change segregation laws?
- In what ways are we still affected by the repercussions of segregation today?
- How can we all work to ensure that hatred, intolerance, racism, etc. is not allowed in our communities?
- How do we make sure that the laws our government passes are not unjust, as were the laws passed regarding segregation?

Materials

- School Segregation Power Point, available in the Database of K-12 Resources (in PDF format)
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”
 - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
- Brown v. BOE handout, attached
- North Carolina’s Pearsall Plan, reading attached
- Optional: Access to LEARN NC’s “School Desegregation” chapter, available at <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-postwar/4.0> (Source Link does not seem to be working, however, this is an alternative <http://www.ncpedia.org/history/20th-Century/school-desegregation>).

Duration

60-90 minutes

Preparation

- Students should have a basic understanding of the 1898 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case and the concept of “separate but equal.” (See the Carolina K-12’s “*Plessy v. Ferguson* and the Roots of Segregation,” available in the Database of Civic Resources.)
- While Jim Crow and segregation are sensitive topics to discuss with students, it is important for students to explore these historical events and understand how engaged community members fought such injustice. In order to study this history effectively and safely however, teachers must have established a safe classroom community with clear expectations of respect, tolerance, open-mindedness, and civil conversation. See the Carolina K-12’s “Activities” section of the Database of Civic Resources (search “Classroom Management/Setting Expectations” and “Character Education”) for ways to ensure a classroom environment conducive to the effective exploration of controversial issues.
- The warm up activity involves purposefully simulating inequality. However, it is important to make sure students understand that this was a fictional exercise and assuage any hurt feelings once the warm up is over.

Procedure

Warm Up: “Separate and UN-equal”

1. As a warm up, set students up to slightly experience the unfairness of “separate but equal.” Before students enter, divide your classroom into two sides, either using a piece of tape down the middle of the floor, or by separating desks in an obvious manner. Once divided, make one side of the classroom more pleasant than the other (place new pencils and paper on each desk, provide homework passes, a piece of candy, etc.). If possible, move classroom resources to that side (pencil sharpeners, waste basket, tissues, class art supplies, TV, computers, etc.), and make as many creative changes possible within the limits of your room to make one side superior to the other. Any resource that is moved to the superior side will not be able to be used by students on the other side of the room.
2. As students enter, separate them on either side of the classroom based on a common (and uncontroversial) factor, such as eye color (brown eyes on one side, all other colors on the other), shoe style or color, pants style, etc. Do not tell students why you are separating the class, or what factor is determining the side they are assigned (although they may figure it out.) Tell students on the superior side

(Side A) that they can choose their own seat. Tell students on the other side (Side B) that they cannot choose their seat and assign them a seat. As students on Side B complain, ignore them. When addressing any comment or request from Side A, be very attentive and kind.

3. Begin class by telling students you are going to play a review game, in which anyone answering a question correctly will get an extra credit point on their final grade. Ask questions from whatever lesson you taught during the last class, but only call on students on Side A to answer. As you receive their answers, overly compliment students on that side, even going as far as to make sarcastic comments regarding Side B. Again, as students on Side B complain of the unfairness, ignore them.
4. Finally, tell students on Side A that due to their excellent behavior, they are all receiving a treat. Hand out a piece of candy and allow them to eat it. Do not give students on Side B the treat, and encourage Side A to flaunt how good it tastes. You may go as far as telling students from Side B to collect the candy wrappers.
5. Continue this unfair treatment for around 5-6 minutes, really working to make the experience of students on the opposite sides drastically different. Finally, return to your normal self, apologize to Side B, and let students know you were behaving in this manner on purpose. (If you gave Side A candy during the exercise, share the same with Side B at this point for fairness.) Encourage students to discuss their experience:
 - What differences did you notice between the two sides of the classroom? In what ways were the two sides of our classroom unequal?
 - Side B, how did you feel regarding your access to resources (i.e., pencil sharpener, candy, my attention, etc.)
 - Side A, how did it feel to be on your side, rather than the other? Explain.
 - If these two sides of our rooms represented entire schools, in which school would students have likely had a better educational experience - the school with more resources or less? Explain.
 - How can a lack of opportunity today affect our future?
 - How does it feel when you are deprived of the same opportunities that someone else is being given?
 - If a school treated students this way, favoring one particular race or gender over another, what are some words that would be associated with this? (prejudice, racism, discrimination, etc.)

Segregation and Schools

6. Ask students to identify the term used to describe the separation of people based on their race. Next, project [slide 2](#) of the accompanying Power Point and ask students to brainstorm the word segregation. Ask students to share what they already know about segregated schools.
7. Explain to students that the experience they just went through may have felt frustrating and unfair, but it is nothing compared to the feelings experienced in North Carolina during the years when schools were segregated. Project [slide 3](#) which contains two images of classrooms of the 1950s ask students to respond:
 - Examine these two classrooms. What do you notice? What similarities and differences do you see between the two?
 - What time period might these photos represent and what evidence makes you think this?
 - How does your current classroom compare and contrast to the 1950s photos you see?
 - When were North Carolina schools segregated?
 - Tell students that both of the images they are viewing are from the 1950s. Only 60 years ago, it was illegal for children of different races to go to the same school. However, segregation was first implemented in North Carolina long before the 1950s.

8. Explain to students that if they were living in North Carolina during the 1800s-1970s, they would not have been legally allowed to attend the same school as someone of another race due to segregation. Go through slides 4-10 which provide some background information regarding segregation in North Carolina schools. Throughout the slides, discuss using questions such as:
 - What were the problems with “separate but equal?”
 - What do you find most surprising or disturbing about the Jim Crow era? How would your life be different today if Jim Crow were still in effect?
 - In what ways did segregation impact minorities other than African Americans?
 - Why did Native Americans want the power to choose to self-segregate themselves? Why were Native Americans worried that their culture would not be preserved otherwise? What is the difference between choosing to be segregated and legally being forced into segregation?
9. Stop on slide 11 and ask students to consider what they think it took to bring about an end to segregation. Ensure students note how it was mainly the active protest (via the courts, protests, sit-ins, boycotts, etc.) of engaged citizens and community members that forced segregation laws and practices to change. Active protests were also required to have laws integrated once they were changed.

How Linda Brown Challenged “Separate but Equal”

10. Explain to students that one of the ways segregation was challenged was through the courts. Project slide 12 and introduce students to young Linda Brown. Explain to students that she was the subject of a famous US Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, that they are going to now learn more about. Provide the attached handout, *Brown v. Board of Education*, instructing students to read and answer the questions. (This can be assigned as individual or partner work.) Once students have finished, allow students to report back on their answers to the provided questions and further discuss:
 - How are we affected today by *Brown v. BOE*?
 - How might history have been different if the Brown family, along with the NAACP, had not been active citizens who advocated for their rights?
 - What negative consequences might you have experienced going to a segregated school? (inadequate resources, lack of diversity, deprived from learning about other cultures, etc.)
 - Given that schools for black children were provided less resources and funding than schools for white children, how might a black student’s future be negatively impacted from such unfair segregation policies? How might this then negatively impact the black student’s children and grandchildren (future generations)?
 - Discuss with students that while segregation was officially ended in the 1970s, much damage had been done throughout those years. When two people line up at the starting line for a race, but one person has to start one mile behind the other, it is unlikely that they are going to be able to finish at the same time. This also means that the person who was unfairly placed one mile behind will have to work much harder through no fault of his/her own.

Fighting Segregation at UNC-Chapel Hill

11. Explain to students that it wasn’t just elementary schools that were segregated. All schools – including high schools, colleges and universities – were also segregated. Explain to students that while Linda Brown’s family was challenging segregation in Kansas, residents of North Carolina were challenging UNC-Chapel Hill. Project slide 13, which is a picture of Leroy Frasier, Ralph Frasier and John Lewis Brandon. Tell students that the first court decision regarding integration attempts in the state of North Carolina was in March of 1951, when a court order required the University of North Carolina to admit African Americans to its law, graduate, and medical schools. On Sept. 17, 1955, Leroy Frasier, Ralph Frasier and John Lewis Brandon – graduates of Durham’s all-black Hillside High School – attended their first classes at UNC. The trio became the first black undergraduates to be admitted in the University’s 166-year history. Discuss:

- Why do you think these students were admitted? Had these students not been active citizens advocating for their rights, how might things have been different?
- How do you imagine these three young men felt as they first entered UNC?

“The Little Rock 9”

12. Remind students that even though *Brown v. BOE* had called for the integration of schools with “deliberate speed,” by 1964 less than 2 percent of formerly segregated school districts had experienced any desegregation. Many state and local governments refuted the idea of integrating schools and when the federal government turned a blind eye and did not intervene, nothing changed. Project the picture of Elizabeth Eckford on [slide 14](#) and ask students to discuss:
- What do you see in this picture? What first captures your attention and why?
 - What emotions do you see represented?
 - What do you think is happening? What evidence makes you think this?
 - (Point out Elizabeth Eckford) What do you think she is experiencing and why? How would you feel in this moment if you were her? Why?
 - Has anyone seen this image before and can anyone share anything about it?
13. Use [slides 15-16](#) to explain the story of the Little Rock 9 and further discuss:
- Even though the President of the United States met with the Governor and told him to protect the Little Rock 9, he disobeyed orders. He also continued to refuse to support integration. How is it possible that even though federal laws and mandates required integration, state and local governments were not complying?

Ruby Bridges

14. Next, project [slide 17](#) and ask students if anyone can identify the little girl pictured. If no one recognizes her, let students know that this cute little girl is Ruby Bridges – she is known as the first African-American child to attend an all-white elementary school in the South. Share Ruby’s story on [slides 18-20](#) and discuss:
- What most surprises you about what Ruby endured?
 - What do you imagine this experience was like for Ruby?
 - Even though this was a hard situation for Ruby to endure, and her family suffered unfair consequences, why do you think Ruby’s parents agreed to let her be the student to integrate the schools in New Orleans?
15. Project the art work on [slide 21](#) and ask students to interpret it:
- What do you see?
 - What do you think the artist is representing in this painting? What is the story here?
 - What title would you give this painting and why?
16. After students have discussed, explain that the painting is by Norman Rockwell and is titled *The Problem We All Live With*. It depicts when Ruby Bridges entered first grade on that first day of court-ordered desegregation in New Orleans (November 14, 1960). The painting is currently displayed in the West Wing of the White House, just outside President Obama's Oval Office.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

17. Ask students if anyone can identify any laws passed to help protect students such as Ruby. Project [slide 24](#) and go over the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Discuss:
- Do you think this federal law fixed the problem and led to immediate integration of schools now that segregation was against federal law?
 - Explain that once again, states and local governments did not immediately adhere to federal law. Powers given to enforce the act were initially weak, so segregation continued to be practiced in

many southern states. However, Congress later asserted its authority to legislate under several different parts of the United States Constitution, principally its power to regulate interstate commerce under Article One (section 8), its duty to guarantee all citizens equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment and its duty to protect voting rights under the Fifteenth Amendment.

Why Such Anger & Hatred?

18. Project slide 23 and discuss with students that it might be hard for them to imagine today the level of hatred people such as Ruby Bridges and the Little Rock Nine experienced, since segregation has not been legal for some years. It might also be hard to imagine that some government officials themselves were in favor of and fighting for segregation. Discuss:
- What shocks you most about this history?
 - How do you typically feel before the first day of school? What are some of the things you worry about? Do you have a ritual that you go through before the first day of school (i.e. pick out your outfit, arrange your school supplies, etc.)? Explain.
 - Many of us feel very nervous before the first day of school. Consider those normal emotions, coupled with the situation Ruby Bridges encountered on her first day of first grade in a new school, or the Little Rock Nine when attempting to attend high school. How do you imagine they felt?
 - What does it say regarding the character of the students such as the “Little Rock Nine”, little Ruby Bridges, and the thousands of other students that integrated various schools across the south that they were able to walk into those schools?
 - How does this serve as an example of why we all need to be very aware of what our government officials are up to, as well as participate in the political process?
 - When viewing the image of Elizabeth Eckford trying to go to school, you noted seeing hatred in the image. Why do you think there was so much hatred based on race? In this image (slide 22), you see people so against integration that they are protesting over it. Why was it so difficult for people to accept one another? What were they so afraid of?
 - In terms of history, segregation actually took place fairly recently (the 1970s were not that long ago.) In fact, some of your own older family members likely experienced segregation and/or integration. In what ways are we still affected by the repercussions of segregation today?
 - Are there any modern day conflicts that you can relate to segregation?
 - Hatred, prejudice, racism, etc. are still problems to be addressed in our society today. No matter how far we come, there always seem to be examples of ignorance, anger, and hate. How can we all work to ensure that such hatred is not allowed in our communities? How do we make sure that the laws our government passes are not racist and unjust, as were the laws for segregation?
 - Why is it important to listen to, learn from, get to know, and befriend people from all different races, cultures, ethnicities, etc.?
- **Optional:** Students can listen to accounts of people who experienced segregation and desegregation in North Carolina by accessing <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-postwar/6017> and <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-postwar/6015> (Source links not working, however, this may be a good alternative <http://www.ncpedia.org/history/20th-Century/school-desegregation>). Play some of the excerpts and use the discussion questions provided in the right column of the page.

North Carolina Fights Integration: The Pearsall Plan

19. Explain to students that strong opposition to integration existed within North Carolina as well. The North Carolina General Assembly created the Pearsall Plan in 1955, in response to *Brown v. BOE's* decision. Assign the attached reading on the Pearsall Plan then discuss:
- Describe the Pearsall Plan. What is your opinion of this resolution to refute integration?

- Under Thomas Pearsall’s amendment, what choice did public schools have regarding integration? What choice did individual parents have?
 - Why do you think the North Carolina General Assembly was so concerned about integration?
 - How did the Pearsall Plan contradict the Civil Rights Act of 1964? (The Act made discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin illegal, yet the Pearsall Plan seemed to further entrench segregation.)
20. Explain that throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, active citizens fought for equality and spoke out against segregation while encouraging their government to change and enact legislation. However, it was not until 1971 that the federal government demanded that North Carolina schools completely desegregate. Discuss:
- What actions did it take, from the government, individual citizens, and groups of citizen advocates, for this change to take place?
 - What other changes throughout history can you think of that involve citizen action and advocacy?
21. As a culminating activity, explain the following assignment:
- Imagine you are living in North Carolina during the year 1956. The Pearsall Committee is holding a public hearing to hear opinions from North Carolinians regarding whether or not schools should remain segregated. Prepare a statement to deliver at the hearing in which you persuade the Committee to rule in favor of desegregation. Make sure you present at least three compelling reasons as to why segregation is not good for North Carolina schools. You should also reference historical events that we addressed within the lesson. Be prepared to present your argument to class.
22. Depending on time, teachers can have students present in front of the entire class the following day, or present in small groups (a quicker option.) Have students provide feedback to the presenter noting what they felt the most compelling argument was contained in their speech.

Additional Activities

- Ask students to determine their favorite college or university and research its history related to segregation. (Was it segregated and if so, when was it integrated? Who were the students and/or other key players who integrated the school? What challenges were faced?) Students who choose an HBCU might research the history of the school, when, why and by whom it was founded, what role the school’s students played in the Civil Rights Movement, etc. (Another option is to have students research their school or another local school in regards to its history.)
- Discuss the Supreme Court Case *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* with students, which addressed busing students to make schools more integrated. Information and lesson plans on this topic can be found at <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-postwar/6083> (Source Link not working)
- Have students read the short oral history passages in [Freedom’s Children, Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories](#). Chapter 3, “Different Classrooms: Segregation and Integration in the Schools” is of particular relevance to this lesson.
- Watch “The Children’s March,” a brilliant documentary chronicling the 1963 children of Birmingham, Ala., who flooded the city’s streets and the city’s jail to challenge segregation. As police used dogs and fire hoses to try and stop them, the children prevailed, defying the police intimidation that long had plagued Birmingham’s black community. This sensational documentary is available for free at <http://www.tolerance.org>.

Name: _____

Brown v. Board of Education

Linda Brown, a young African-American girl, was seven years old in the year of 1951. She lived in Topeka, Kansas and attended Monroe Elementary School, a school designated for African American students. It was hard for Linda to travel to Monroe Elementary School each day since it was far from where she lived. She had to cross a railroad yard and a busy boulevard to wait for a frequently delayed bus that would take her 20 blocks to the school. Even though another elementary school, Sumner Elementary, was located right by her home, it was designated for white students only and thus, Linda was not allowed to go to school there because of her race. Topeka's elementary schools had been segregated since 1896, when the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* sanctioned "separate but equal" classrooms for white and black (and other minority) children.

- *Why was it unfair for 7-year-old Linda Brown to have to attend Monroe Elementary?*

In 1950, the NAACP recruited 13 black parents (including the Browns) to attempt to enroll their children in neighborhood schools. After they were denied entrance, the NAACP filed a lawsuit on their behalf. Unfortunately in August 1951, a three-judge federal panel threw out the case, ruling that although segregation might be detrimental to Topeka's black children, it was not illegal, since all Topeka schools had equal facilities and programs. However, the NAACP appealed to the Supreme Court, joining the Brown case with similar cases from Delaware, Virginia, South Carolina, and the District of Columbia, and naming it after the Kansas case to show that the issue was not unique to the South. The chief NAACP attorney was Thurgood Marshall, who became the first African-American member of the Supreme Court a decade later, argued that segregation was unconstitutional. It stigmatized African Americans, thereby denying them the equal protection guaranteed by the 14th Amendment. Chief Justice Earl Warren and a unanimous court agreed. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

- *What do you think happened next?*

Even though on May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," the court did not order immediate implementation of the decision. In 1955, often called **Brown II**, the decision was made that local district courts in each state would oversee implementation of the 1954 decision "with deliberate speed."

- *Do you think it was a good idea to allow individual state courts to oversee desegregation of schools? Why or why not?*

"The NAACP urged desegregation to proceed immediately or at least within firm deadlines. The states claimed both were impracticable....By 1964, a decade after the first decision, less than 2 percent of formerly

segregated school districts had experienced any desegregation.” It wasn’t until the 1970s that segregation in public schools had ended.

- *What were schools not being desegregated as mandated by the Brown II decision?*

The United States Supreme Court's ruling in the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. Following the *Brown* ruling, North Carolina enacted legislation that undermined the Supreme Court ruling.

In August 1954 and in response to the *Brown* decision, North Carolina Governor William B. Umstead created a **Governor’s Special Advisory Committee on Education**, with Thomas Pearsall, a prominent Rocky Mount farmer and businessman and former North Carolina Speaker of the House, as chairman. Along with Pearsall, the advisory committee included twelve whites and three blacks. The Committee concluded that integration in the public schools could not be accomplished nor should it be attempted. Trying to delay desegregation, the committee proposed giving local districts control over the assignment of students to particular schools. As a consequence, in the spring of 1955, the General Assembly enacted the **Pupil Assignment Act**. It used race-neutral criteria to block options for African Americans to transfer to white schools.

After Governor Umstead’s untimely death, Governor Luther H. Hodges continued to stall desegregation. Governor Hodges created a new committee that became known as the Pearsall Committee. Chaired by Pearsall, the seven-member committee included no African Americans. At the conclusion of several meetings, conferences, and hearings, the committee recommended a state constitutional amendment that empowered the General Assembly to enact legislation circumventing integration. The legislation proposed by the committee, which became the **Pearsall Plan**, amended the Compulsory School Attendance Law so that students might be excused from attending an integrated public school. The Plan also recommended that the state consider providing private school tuition grants to parents whose children were assigned to the integrated public schools.

During a special session of the General Assembly in July 1956, legislators adopted the Pearsall Plan with only two dissenting votes, yet needed the public's opinion for the bill to become law. Many African American leaders and some whites argued that the Pearsall Plan violated *Brown*, and others criticized the Plan because they claimed it threatened public schools by relinquishing power to local school boards. In the end, North Carolinians voted five to one to uphold racial segregation in the state’s public schools.

Although the **1964 Federal Civil Rights Act**, which contained a provision prohibiting discrimination in public education, declared the Pearsall Plan unconstitutional in 1966, token integration and residential segregation allowed the Pearsall Plan to continue. Finally, the case of *Godwin v. Johnston County Board of Education* (1969) ruled the Pearsall Plan unconstitutional.

Source: <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/318/entry>