

Title: The Fight to End “Separate but Equal” in American Schools

Background: From the time the 14th Amendment was ratified in 1868, it was challenged. The *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision introduced the “separate but equal” standard that legalized segregation until the *Brown* decision in 1954. Between 1896 and 1954, a number of key cases challenged the *Plessy v. Ferguson* unsuccessfully. We will examine the factors that contributed to the success of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case in ending legal segregation and doing away with “separate but equal” facilities for African Americans.

Grade Levels: Grades 6-8

Subject Areas: Social Studies, U.S. History, Language Arts,

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

1. Participate in class discussion activities and use reasons, facts, and examples to support their opinions about the impact of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.
2. Conduct primary source research about various court cases related to *Brown v. Board of Education* and the “separate but equal” standard established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* and share their findings in class and group discussions.
3. Utilize critical reading and viewing skills to collect factual data related to *Brown v. Board of Education* and other related cases .
4. Utilize group work skills when working with partners and small group members to conduct research and create class projects.
5. Create a graphic organizer (Venn Diagram) comparing and contrasting *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education* and a summary paragraph of what the diagram illustrates by working together as a class.
6. Create an informational display about a court case that preceded *Brown v. Board of Education*.
7. Use group presentation skills to showcase what they have learned about their assigned court case and to teach classmates about the facts surrounding their case.

Relevant National Standards:

This lesson correlates to the national McREL standards located online at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks>

U.S. History

Standard 29: Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties

Language Arts

Writing

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Reading

Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

Listening and Speaking

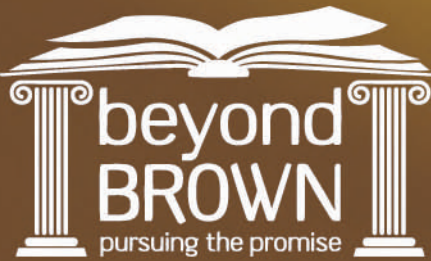
Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Viewing

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

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Thinking and Reasoning

Standard 1: Understands and applies basic principles of presenting an argument

Standard 3: Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences

Working with Others

Standard 1: Contributes to the overall effort of a group

Standard 4: Demonstrated effective interpersonal communication skills

Estimated Time:

Students will need 3-4 forty five minute class periods to complete the lesson.

Materials Needed:

- Full text or summary of the 14th Amendment (1 per student)
- Summary information on *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education* cases
- *Plessy v. Ferguson* Fact Finding Guide (provided with plan)
- *Brown v. Board of Education* Fact Finding Guide (provided with plan)
- Television with vcr to view selected “Beyond Brown” excerpts
- Overhead, blackboard, or chart paper for recording Venn Diagram and related summary paragraph
- Access to a variety of primary resources including Internet and library research materials.
- Varied art supplies including poster board, markers, colored pencils, stencils, scissors, glue, etc. (optional)
- Access to computers with multimedia (such as PowerPoint) and desktop publishing software (optional)

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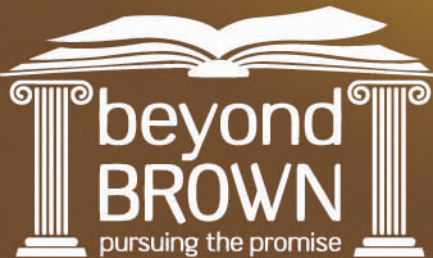
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Procedures:

1. To provide students with background necessary to understand this lesson, and to create student interest, post on the board or overhead or place on each student desk a copy of the 14 Amendment or a summary of the Amendment, whichever you believe will be better for student understanding. This is available from the companion web site at <http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/history/14thamendment.html>
2. Begin by asking students to take turns reading all/parts of the Amendment aloud so all students can hear. Once the Amendment has been read, spend several minutes reviewing the contents of the Amendment and discussing how this Amendment impacted people once it went into effect.
3. Next, introduce students to the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* by giving a very brief overview of the case. Using one of the summaries from the Related Resources section, have students use the computer to access the summary information about the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, or provide students with printed copies of a summary to use as a review as they work in pairs to answer the questions on the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Fact Finding Guide worksheet. Give students 10-15 minutes to answer the questions on the worksheet.
4. Once students have collected facts about the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, conduct a class discussion about what they learned. Begin by having students share their answers for each of the questions on the guide. Be sure to spend plenty of time discussing question 8 so students can see the importance of the 14th Amendment in this case.
5. Next, explain to students that they will be learning about what some call “the most significant Supreme Court decision in history”. To get students interested, show them the following clips from the program “Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise”.
 - Watch the first 7 minutes of the film as well as 12:00-13:22 so students can get basic background information about the case.
 - Watch from 53:49 to end of film so students can hear commentary about the significance of this court case.
6. Once viewing is complete, explain to students that they will be using the *Brown v. Board of Education* Fact Finding Guide worksheet to learn key information about the significance of this case and its connection to the 14th Amendment. Using one of the summaries from the Related Resources section, have students use the computer to access the summary information about the *Brown* case, or provide students with printed copies of a summary to use as a review as they work in pairs to answer the questions on the worksheet. Give students 10-15 minutes to complete the worksheet.
7. Once students have collected facts about the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, conduct another class discussion about what they learned. Begin by having students share their answers for each of the questions on the guide. Be sure to spend plenty of time discussing question 8 so students can see the importance of the 14th Amendment in this case.
8. Now that students have some basic understanding of the 14th Amendment and background knowledge of both court cases, work as a group to compare and contrast the two cases. On an overhead screen, blackboard, or large chart paper, work as a class to construct a Venn Diagram showing the similarities and differences between the two cases. Have students record a copy of the Venn Diagram as your work together to list all of the like and different aspects. Be sure to include a title on the Venn Diagram and use data from the two case summary worksheets when noting similarities and differences.

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9. So students can see how Venn Diagrams can be used to summarize information, work as a class to write a paragraph that describes the similarities and differences represented in the Venn Diagram created by the group. Have students record the summary paragraph on the same paper as the Venn Diagram so they can recall the information being summarized in the graphic organizer.

10. Return to the discussion of the significance of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by facilitating a short discussion including questions such as:

- What major changes did the *Brown* decision make in America's school?
- In what ways did the *Brown* decision lay the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement?
- If the Supreme Court had handed down a decision opposite the one they did, how would U.S. schools be different today?
- In your opinion, was the Supreme Court correct in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision?
- From the time when *Plessy v. Ferguson* was decided in 1896 and made “separate by equal” the law, over 50 years passed before this decision was successfully challenged. Why do you think it took so long for the Supreme Court to decide that “separate but equal” schools and segregation were unfair and should be done away with?

11. To help students see the significance of the *Brown* decision and how hard fought this victory was, have them work in small groups to research other cases that challenged the *Plessy* decision in the years leading up to *Brown*. Using the companion web site section “The Long Road to Brown” Facts found at http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/history/factsheet_history.html, and other primary sources, have students work in small groups to research the following cases:

- 1938 Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada
- 1940 Alston v. School Board of City of Norfolk
- 1948 Sipuel v. Oklahoma State Regents
- 1950 McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents
- 1950 Sweatt v. Painter

Students should create an informational display that can be used to teach others the particulars of the case they studied.

The display should include:

- pictures (check the companion web site photo gallery at <http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/history/photos.html>)
- important quotes
- key facts and people associated with the case
- the court's decision
- the reasoning behind the court's decision
- any other interesting or relevant information

In addition, each group should discuss how bringing this case to court may have helped make the road to filing the *Brown* case somewhat easier or more successful.

Encourage students to use presentation software such as PowerPoint to create a multimedia type of presentation if possible. For those with limited computer access, encourage students to create high quality poster size displays that are well organized, colorful, and interesting to look at. The creation of several posters may be necessary to present all relevant information. Each student in the group should present at least one important piece of information related to the case.

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12. Once groups have finished their research and created their displays, they should share what they learned with their classmates. Present the cases in chronological order so that students can see the progress (or lack of it) made on this issue over time.

Evaluation Ideas:

1. Students could receive participation grades for involvement in class discussions and group work activities. Groups could use peer evaluations to rank the success of each group member.
2. Accuracy grades could be assigned for research answers gathered on the two Fact Finding Guides.
3. Completion grades could be assigned for accurately recording the Venn Diagram and summary paragraph done as a large group in class.
4. Using a scoring guide, self, or peer evaluations, students and teachers could grade the quality of each group's informational display and group presentation of this project.

Extension Activities:

1. Using what students have learned about *Brown v. Board of Education*, have them write a persuasive essay that addresses the following question:
 - In your opinion, would you consider *Brown v. Board of Education* the “most significant Supreme Court decision in history”? Explain your answer.
2. Many people felt that the *Brown* case laid the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement. Examine the *Brown* case more closely and identify reasons you agree or disagree with this statement. Write your answers in the form of a persuasive speech or essay.
3. While the *Brown* decision was supposed to do away with “separate but equal” and desegregate schools, many would argue that in a large number of schools across America, this is not the case. Bring in an expert panel of adults who attended school in the 50's and 60's and ask them to discuss how today's schools are different. Have the expert panel share their ideas about whether or not “separate but equal” has been done away with and about whether desegregation has taken place in U.S. schools.

Online Resources:

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise

Find the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case at <http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/history/plessyvferg.html>

Find 14th Amendment text at <http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/history/14thamendment.html>

Get the full history of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case at <http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/history/fullhistory.html>

For information on cases that led up to *Brown v. Board of Education*, see “The Long Road to Brown” section's fact sheet at http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/history/factsheet_history.html

For access to a timeline discussing related cases, see <http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/history/timeline.html>

To view pictures related to the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, see <http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/history/photos.html>

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Landmark Cases

Get background and summary information about *Plessy v. Ferguson* at <http://www.landmarkcases.org/plessy/background2.html>

Get background and summary information about *Brown v. Board of Education* at <http://www.landmarkcases.org/brown/background2.html>

The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow

Read a summary of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case at http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_plessy.html

Read a summary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case at http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_brown.html

About the Author:

Lisa Prosocki is an independent educational consultant who taught middle school and high school English, social studies, reading, and technology courses for twelve years. Prosocki has worked extensively with PBS authoring and editing many lesson plans for various PBS programs and Teacher-Source. In addition to conducting workshops for teachers at various state and national meetings, Prosocki also works with many corporate clients creating training programs and materials, facilitating leadership and operations workshops, and providing instructional support for new program rollouts. Prosocki has authored one book and also serves as an editor for other writers of instructional materials.

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Plessy v. Ferguson Fact Finding Guide

Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Using the resources available to you, work with your partner to complete research that will help you answer each question below. Provide as much detailed information as possible for each question so you will be well prepared for class discussion and other activities. Both of you should record complete answers on your worksheets.

1. Who were the main people involved in the case?
2. When did the case take place?
3. Where did the events related to the case happen?
4. What were the main arguments presented by each side in this case?
5. What was the ruling in this case?
6. Why was this decision made (What reasons for the decision were given by the judge)?
7. How did this decision affect the people involved in the case and others like it?
8. What role did the 14th Amendment play in this case?
9. Other interesting facts or details about this case are: (use the back if needed)



Brown v. Board of Education Fact Finding Guide

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