

# The story of Prince Edward County schools

## Lesson Plan

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### Introduction

May 17, 2014 marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Supreme Court decision “Brown v. Board of Education.” The landmark case was a radical shift from the 1896 Supreme Court decision “Plessy v. Ferguson” which had declared that “separate but equal” accommodations were legal. Although the victory had been won in the courtroom, it would take the next decade and beyond for the law to be implanted in the American public school system, as it was met with fierce opposition nearly everywhere it was attempted. One such story took place in Prince Edward County, Virginia, where the school system closed for five years rather than integrate their schools. Through the lens of that story, this lesson explores the right to education and the battle that ensued to end centuries of unequal opportunities for African-Americans.

### Subjects

Social studies, history, civil rights, government, political systems, education, human rights

### Estimated Time

One 90 minute class period

### Grade Level

Middle and high school

### Materials

- Education questionnaire
- What are human rights? handout
- Interactive online timeline <http://bit.ly/1h9qnID>
- Biography of Robert. F. Kennedy
- Closing the schools handout
- School comparison handout
- Prince Edward County Schools handout
- Analysis of Prince Edward Schools Closings worksheet

### Warm Up Activity

Pass out the **Education Questionnaire** to students and have them complete the statements.

Ask students “what are human rights?” and write their answers on the board .

If students lack prior knowledge on human rights, show students the following 10 minute film on human rights: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oh3BbLk5UIQ>

Tell students that today they are going to learn how the role of human rights changed the political landscape of Virginia and the human rights defenders who fought for them.

Hand out the **What are human rights?** page and have students answer the first question using the information they learned from the video.

Ask students to describe someone who could be called a human rights defender? Would they have a specific gender, age, background, race, religion and ethnicity? Or could anyone become a human rights defender?

Explain that in the story of Prince Edward County, each of these five human rights will play a role and it is there job to identify when they come in to play. Possibly the most important right in this story is the right to education, so let’s take a deeper look at it.

## Main Activities

### *Back to School*

Pass out handout **Closing the schools** to students and then read the first three paragraphs to students.

Ask students for their reaction and then have them read the reactions of the Prince Edward County students.

### **How could this have happened?**

Explain to the students that education and discrimination had gone hand and hand in America since its inception. Most slaves were forbidden to read or write and even once slavery had been abolished the education offered to blacks was not equal to their white student counterparts. Only with Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* did things begin to change in the classroom, but it was not easy and it did not happen overnight.

Hand out the **School comparisons** handout and have students find Prince Edward County on their map of Virginia. Then ask students to look at the difference between the schools and ask them to verbalize the differences between the two columns of Virginia schools.

Show students the interactive timeline (<http://bit.ly/1h9qnID>) and start by reading *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Then jump to the next event “16 year old Barbara Johns organizes student strike in Prince Edward County, Virginia, to protest the inequality of segregated schools,” and play the ten minute story for the students.

Ask students if they think Barbara Johns was a human rights defender and have them explain their answer. Which of the five UDHR articles did she use in her fight for equal rights?

Scroll to the next event on the timeline, “RFK creates controversy by inviting Nobel Prize winner Dr. Ralph Bunche to speak at the University of Virginia,” and explain that at the same time that Barbara Johns was organizing students to protest in Prince Edward County, another human rights defender was challenging racial stereotypes on his own college campus – The University of Virginia.

Ask students: How did Robert F. Kennedy’s actions promote equal treatment between races? How could something as seemingly innocent as the action of inviting a guest speaker make such a huge statement? Pass out **Robert F. Kennedy Biography** to students and take turn reading it aloud.

Move to the next event on the timeline, “*Brown v. Board of Education*,” and show students the video if they are unfamiliar with the case. If they are, just move on. Ask students, “How did this court case change the future of the U.S.? How would the entire country benefit from this ruling?”

Explain to students that the change did not happen overnight and that those involved in the civil rights movement encountered many more challenges along the path to equality. Scroll through the next events to show students what else was going on during the 1950s and to give them context for the upcoming events.

Scroll to the next event, “Prince Edward County school board closes public schools to avoid integration,” and explain to students that they will take a closer look at how this could happen after *Brown v. Board of Education* had passed years earlier.

### **The Battle for Prince Edward County Schools**

Pass out **Prince Edward County Schools** handout and in small groups have students read the story aloud. During the reading, facilitate discussion around the questions students organically develop as they read.

You may want to suggest that students keep a list of:

- Things that surprised you
- Strong reactions you felt during the reading
- Questions you still have about what happened

As a class have students report back their reaction to the story and the questions above.

Then have students complete **Analysis of Prince Edward Schools Closings** on their own.

## Conclusion Activity

There are two directions that you might want to go with the right to education with your class: 1) Equity in education in the U.S. or 2) Education as a human right around the world. Below are resources to help get those conversations started in your classroom.

1. As a class discuss how things in education have changed in the last 50 years, from 1964 to today, and how things have stayed the same. You may want to use the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs video project to get the conversation started <http://raceandchange.tumblr.com/>. Recently a report by the Department of Education came out concluding from data that students of color face systematic racism in the public school system- play the story for the students and get their take on the situation <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/study-education-inequality/>
2. Play Unesco's three minute video, " 57 million children out of school" for students <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/reaching-oosc.aspx>. After, ask students for their reactions to the information they just heard. Are they surprised? Are they concerned? Continue the discussion asking the students for the risks and consequences they predict will come from not making education a basic human right to all children.

## Become a defender

Children around the world are in need of books from all reading levels. Start a book drive at your school and work with Speak Truth To Power to make sure they get to the students that need them most.

<http://curriculum.rfkcenter.org/curriculums?locale=en>

Educate others around you of the history of Virginia's civil rights battle by telling your family, friends and classmates about what happened in Prince Edward County.

Write to your congressperson to ask that they support legislation that creates equal opportunities for all students.

## Common Core Standards

### Argument

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1](#) Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1](#) Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1](#) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1](#) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

### Informative

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

### Narrative

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3](#) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.3](#) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3](#) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

### Speaking and Listening

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.