



School Integration and the Little Rock Crisis

By Lara Burenin

Introduction: Students will understand the challenges faced by people who fought to integrate schools in the south during the 1960s. Students will also understand that different people of a range of ages and occupations worked to support the integration of schools at that time.

Grades: 4-8, though the unit is targeted at the fifth grade.

CA State Standards: Grades K-5: Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills, Grades K-5, Chronological and Spatial Thinking, Research, Evidence, and Point of View, and Grades 6-8: Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills, Research, Evidence, and Point of View

Essential Question: How were young people empowered to make change through non-violence during the Civil Rights Movement or African-American Freedom Struggle?

Sub-Questions:

1. Why did some people want to integrate schools?
2. What challenges did people fighting for integration face?
3. What role did youth play in the effort to integrate schools?

Unit Parts:

1. Introduction to School Integration
2. The Little Rock School Crisis



Part One: Introduction to School Integration

Interactive Read Aloud of *The School is Not White!* by Doreen Rappaport

Materials Needed:

- Rappaport, Doreen. *The School is Not White!* Hyperion Book, 2005.
- Chart/Poster paper

Activities/Instructions:

1. **Opening Activity: Activate Prior Knowledge by** brainstorming with students using the following prompt: “Schools in the South before the 1960s were segregated. Black students went to separate schools than white students. What do you know about segregated schools and how black and white students came to go to school together?”
2. **Build Background Knowledge:** Give students the following information:
In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled on a case called *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka*. A young girl wanted to go to the school close to her house, but she wasn’t allowed because she was black, and it was a white school. The Court ruled that it is illegal to make students go to different schools because of the color of their skin, especially because the schools were separate, but not equal. The schools that white students went to were nicer, while the schools that African American students went to were often run down and didn’t have current materials for them to learn. Even though the Supreme Court said this, it took a lot of hard work to make sure black people could attend good schools with white students because there were many people who didn’t want that to happen.
3. Tell students that today your class is going to read a book about the first black children to attend an all-white school. Read Doreen Rappaport’s book *The School is Not White!* out loud with your class.
4. Ask the following discussion questions for during and after the reading.
 - Why do the children’s parents want them to attend the all-white school?
 - Why doesn’t the plantation owner want the black children to go to the white school?
 - How do the children feel to be the only black children at the school?
 - How did the efforts of children like the main characters in the book affect what schools are like today?
 - Have you ever felt excluded from something because of who you are – because of your race, religion, gender, language, or anything else about you?
 - How would you feel if you had to face a group of people who were all different from you who were preventing people like you from getting what they deserve in life?
5. **Independent Work/Follow Up:** In groups of 2-4, have students brainstorm: “What did we learn today about the effort to integrate schools in the South?” Compile answers on a chart to be put up on the classroom wall.



Part Two: The Little Rock School Crisis

Materials Needed:

- Handout A: Interview with Ernest Green: Going to School with Segregationists
- Handout B: Interview with Delores Boyd
- Handout C: Atlanta Daily World Article: “[Dr. King Asks Non-Violence in Little Rock School Crisis.](#)” (Or use the slightly excerpted version in included handout).
- Handout D: Photograph of Elizabeth Eckford walking to Little Rock Central High School before school
- Handout E: Interview with Ernest Green: Making it through the Year
- Handout F: Key Vocabulary

The interviews with Boyd and Green are excerpted from: Levine, Ellen. *Freedom's Children*. Putnam Juvenile, 1993. The photo of Elizabeth Eckford is from the [NPR website](#).

Activities/Instructions:

1. **Link/Opener:** Review what students learned in the previous class about how one family in the rural South fought to integrate their school in the 1960s. Remind students that even before that happened, many people worked to integrate schools in bigger cities in the South.
2. **Document Based Questions (DBQs):** Use the documents in Handouts A through E to help students answer the essential question. This exercise will take several days/class periods. Each day, introduce the document to the whole class. Build background knowledge about the document, identify and define key vocabulary. Read the head note of the document together.
3. Have students work in groups to read each document and answer the accompanying questions.
4. Debrief their answers at the end to reach common understanding of the document and its questions as they relate to the essential question and the sub-questions. Write answers to the essential and sub-questions on the charts as they are discussed each day.



**Handout A: *Interview with Ernest Green: Going to School with Segregationists*
Excerpted from Ellen Levine's *Freedom's Children*.**

Head Note: Ernest Green was one of the Little Rock Nine, and the only senior in the group. In this excerpt from an interview with him, he describes what it was like getting to school every day and being at school with the segregationists, people who wanted to keep segregation.

“I never expected it to be life-threatening, which it was initially. I didn't have any real sense of how dangerous it could have been until we got home. We were in this huge school. I didn't hear any of the mob outside. When we were whisked out of school back to our homes, we sat there and watched it on TV. This is real, I thought. This is no day at the beach.

We were picked up from by the army at our individual houses and taken to Mrs. Bates' house, which as our gathering spot. From there we got into a station wagon. It was a convoy. They had a jeep in front, a jeep behind, and armed soldiers in each of them. I think there were machine-gun mounts on the back of the jeeps.

Every day the troops would bring us to the school. Initially we each had a paratrooper who would wait outside the classroom to escort us to the next class, so that we were never alone... When the segregationists realized we weren't leaving, they started coming back (to school). And when they came back, all hell started breaking loose...As they withdrew the troops from inside the corridors, you were subjected to all kinds of taunts, someone attempting to trip you, pour ink on you, in some other way ruin your clothing, and at worst, someone physically attacking you... I got hit with water guns. We got calls at all times of the night- people saying they were going to have acid in the water guns and they were going to squirt it in our faces.”

Questions

- 1) Why did they have to bring soldiers to the school to protect the black students?
- 2) What did the segregationists do to the black students after the soldiers left?
- 3) How would you feel if someone did those things to you at school? How would you respond?



Handout B: *Interview with Delores Boyd*
Excerpted from Ellen Levine's *Freedom's Children*.

Head Note: Delores Boyd was one of thirteen students who integrated Lanier High School in Montgomery, Alabama in 1965.

By the time I left junior high school, I was more than ready to be in the group to go to the desegregated schools. I knew that white students at public schools were taking Latin, French, and Spanish. I knew that no black student had that. I knew that at some schools white students were taking sciences that were not offered to us. And I wanted to go to the best high school.

My memory of that first year comes in bunches. I remember my history teacher. I knew she despised me. It was almost as if she dared me to say something about it. What was there to say? She was a mean old woman who grudgingly gave me an A.

Questions

- 1) Why did Delores Boyd want to attend a white high school?
- 2) Are there any reasons students might have wanted to stay at a segregated school with other black students?
- 3) Using what you learned from this document and the interview with Ernest Green, who were the different people at Ernest and Delores's high schools that discriminated against them, and what did they do?



Handout C: *Atlanta Daily World Article: “Dr. King Asks Non-Violence in Little Rock School Crisis”*

Head note: The Atlanta Daily Word published this article on Thursday, September 26, 1957. It discusses a telegram Martin Luther King, Jr. sent to Daisy Bates, the leader of the NAACP in Little Rock and a strong supporter of the Little Rock Nine. Even though there were protests and mob gatherings against the Little Rock Nine, and attacks on Daisy Bates’ home, Dr. King tells her to encourage the supporters of integration to act peacefully.

Dr. King Asks Non-Violence in Little Rock School Crisis

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., president of the Montgomery, Ala. Improvement Association, has urged the people of Little Rock, Ark. To be Christian and dignified in their struggle for integration and to fight violence with non-violence.

Dr. King, well known pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, said:
“Urge the people of Little Rock to follow a way of non-violence at this time. I know this is difficult advice at a time when you are being terrorized, stoned, and threatened by ruthless mobs. But non-violence is the only way to a lasting solution of the problem.

“You must meet physical force with soul force. You have no alternative but to continue the struggle for integrated schools, but to do it with a thorough commitment to Christian principles.

...

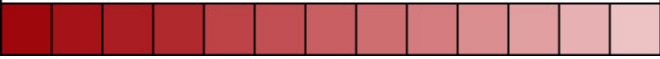
“History is on your side. World opinion is with you. The moral conscience of millions of white Americans is with you. Keep struggling with this faith and the tragic night of anarchy and mob rule which encompass your city at this time will be transformed into the glowing daybreak of freedom and justice.”

The young minister has said he is “optimistic” about the integration process and has predicted that “before the turn of the century segregation and discrimination will not exist in America.”

Questions

- 1) This article was published in Atlanta, Georgia, over 500 miles from Little Rock, Arkansas. What does this tell you about publicity about the Little Rock School crisis?
- 2) Why does Dr. King want the people of Little Rock to be peaceful even when the people opposing integration are violent?
- 3) This article says Dr. King said that “before the turn of the century segregation and discrimination will not exist in America.” Now that it is the next century, do you think Dr. King was right that segregation would end in America? Why or why not?

Liberation Curriculum





Handout D: *Photograph of Elizabeth Eckford walking to Little Rock Central High School before school*

Source: [NPR Website](#)

Head note: Each morning at the beginning of the school year, as the 9 black students approached school, people against integration protested in front of the school and heckled the black students as they approached.



Questions

- 1) Judging from their clothing and appearance, who are the white women in the picture, and why are they at Central High School this morning?
- 2) What is the job of the soldiers in the background? What are they doing in the picture?
- 3) What does Elizabeth Eckford's expression tell you about how she must carry herself in this event?
- 4) Using what you know about Martin Luther King Jr.'s opinion of the Little Rock School Crisis from previous documents, what do you think he would he say about this photograph? Give examples from other documents to support your answer.



Handout E: *Interview with Ernest Green: Making it through the Year*
Excerpted from Ellen Levine's *Freedom's Children*.

Head note: Ernest Green, one of the Little Rock Nine, and the first African American to graduate from Central High School. This is an excerpt from an interview with him some time after he graduated.

“I decided after the segregationists started coming back that I was going to make it through that year. Short of being shot, I could outlast anything that they could give. I think it was a combination of the family support at home and the relationship that grew between the nine of us... One thing I think is very important is this: while the nine of us may have been preselected, there are really nine, ten, thirty, forty, fifty kids in every community that could have done that. It wasn't that nine people fell out of the sky in Little Rock. We were all ordinary kids. You really do have the ability to do a lot more than either you've been told or you've been led to believe by your surroundings. If given the opportunity, you'd be surprised at how much you can do, how much you can achieve.”

Questions

- 1) What gave Ernest and the others in the Little Rock Nine the strength to stay at Central High School for the year?
- 2) When is a time you have seen “ordinary kids” in your school or community work together to accomplish something difficult in order to make the community better?
- 3) What is a problem in your school or community that you would like to work with other students to fight against?



Handout F: Key Vocabulary

Document 1

Initially
Segregationists
Mob
Convoy
Taunts

Document 2

Despised
Grudgingly

Document 3

Alternative
Principles
Anarchy
Ruthless

Document 4

None (photograph)

Document 5

Preselected