

LESSON PLAN

70+ Years Later: The Legacy of Brown v. Board of Education

What is Brown v. Board of Education and what is its legacy in today's schools?

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-1	2-3	45 minutes	Reading, Speaking and Listening, Language
4-6	7-12		

LESSON OVERVIEW

"We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." These are the words of the landmark Supreme Court decision on May 17, 1954 that declared segregated schools unconstitutional. More than seventy years later, even though much progress has been made, there are still great inequalities and disparities in our school system.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the Brown v. Board of Education ruling and will read about and analyze the ways in which school segregation has persisted in the U.S.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn more about the landmark school desegregation ruling, Brown v. Board of Education.
- Students will learn more about the ways in which segregation in schools has continued.
- Students will analyze how school segregation manifests in different places across the country.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- [The lasting legacy of Brown v. Board and ongoing education challenges](#) (Video, 9 min., 11 sec.)
- [The Segregation Explorer](#) (to project on board/smart board)
- [Why school segregation is getting worse](#) (one copy for each student)



Web Related Connections

Lesson Plans

[Civil Rights Act of 1964: 7 Ways to Commemorate the Anniversary](#)

[Elections and the Youth Vote](#)

[Martin Luther King, Jr. and Civil Rights: Relevancy for Today](#)

[Voting Rights Then and Now](#)

[Young People in the Civil Rights Movement](#)

Other Resources

[Civil Rights Movement](#)

[George Floyd, Racism and Law Enforcement](#)

[Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism](#)

[What is the CROWN Act?](#)

Key Words

abdicate
achievement gap
compliance
court oversight
desegregate
disparate

Information Sharing: What is Brown v. Board of Education and School Desegregation?

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: *Has anyone heard of Brown v. Board of Education? Does anyone know what school desegregation means?*
2. Share some or all of the following:
 - More than seventy years ago, on May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that schools could no longer be segregated and that state laws establishing separate public schools for Black and white students were unconstitutional. Before this ruling, not a single Black student attended a majority white public school in the American South and many schools were segregated, which meant that Black and white students attended separate schools.
 - Even though the legal battle was settled in 1954, there was a great deal of resistance to desegregate schools, and it took time. In 1957, Virgil Blossom, the superintendent at Little Rock Central High School, attempted to integrate the school by recruiting volunteers from Black high schools. The Little Rock Nine, as they were known, attempted to attend school, and were met with hostility and resistance. The next year, public schools in Little Rock closed for a year to prevent further integration. Eventually, U.S. schools integrated, though many of them did so with a great deal of resistance.
 - Brown v. Board of Education was a landmark case which was critical in our country's efforts toward ensuring equal education for all. However, even though there was much to celebrate about the decision and significant progress has been made, there are still vast inequities and disparities in our school system and continued segregation.
3. Engage students in a brief discussion by asking: *What did you already know? What surprises you about this? What more do you want to know?*
4. Optional: To learn more, show this 9-minute video from 2024, which marked the 70-year anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education decision: [The lasting legacy of Brown v. Board and ongoing education challenges](#). After watching, have students turn and talk with a person nearby. Each student should take 2 minutes to share what they learned, what their biggest takeaways are and what more they want to know.

Key Words (cont.)

economic inequality
inherently
integration
mandated
school choice
segregate
unconstitutional

Looking at Maps: School Segregation

1. Project the map from [The Segregation Explorer](#). Explain that this interactive map shows school and neighborhood Black-white segregation between racial/ethnic and economic groups in states, counties, metropolitan areas and school districts over the past several decades.
2. Explain to students that the green coloring/shading shows the states' level of segregation; the states with the lightest green are the least segregated and the darkest green are the most segregated states. Ask students: *What do you notice? What do you wonder?*
3. Then explain that the yellow and orange coloring/shading shows individual schools and their percentage of white students; the schools with the lightest coloring show the lowest percentage of white students. You may need to zoom in to engage students in analyzing this. Ask students: *What do you notice? What do you wonder?*
4. You can also click "Data Options" (top left) to explore specific regions, states, schools and specific years. If time permits, look at this section also or assign students for homework to explore a particular region of the country, year or school and write a short essay on what they discovered.

 Reading Activity: School Segregation Today

1. Explain to students that we are going to read an article about the current state of school segregation. Distribute a copy of [Why school segregation is getting worse](#) to each student. Give students 10-15 minutes to read the article or read aloud together, with students taking turns reading.
2. Engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:
 - What thoughts and feelings came to mind as you were reading the article?
 - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
 - What did you find surprising? Not surprising?
 - Do you have any prior knowledge or experience with school segregation? How does that inform your point of view on this topic?
 - What does the article suggest about why school segregation is getting worse?
 - What does the author think we should do to reverse school segregation?
 - What do you think we should do about school segregation?
 - What is your biggest takeaway from reading the article?

 Closing

Have students share something new they learned about school segregation and desegregation.

 Additional Reading and Resources

- [70 years after Brown vs. Board of Education, public schools still deeply segregated](#) (The Conversation, January 5, 2024)
- [History of Brown v. Board of Education](#) (NAACP)
- [School Segregation in Cities Across America Mapped](#) (The Century Foundation, May 17, 2022)
- [School segregation surges 70 years after Brown v. Board ruling](#) (Axios, May 14, 2024)
- [The Unfinished Battle for Integration in a Multiracial America – from Brown to Now](#) (The Civil Rights Project/UCLA, April 2024)

Common Core Anchor Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. R7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate. L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.