

Student Research into Desegregation of Schools

By Larry Gann

Overview

This unit acquaints high school students with the history of integration as it applies in their hometown or geographic areas. To do this, they will research primary materials, such as newspaper articles, about how their community or locality implemented integration laws, and highlight their research by interviewing people with direct knowledge of that time. As such, students will acquire skills in interviewing and note taking, as well as editing these items. You should require students to work extensively outside the classroom to accomplish this goal.

You should also use this unit, ideally suited for high school students, with studies in civil rights, modern American history, and legal or constitutional history. The 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution provide the basis for the study along with various local sources. Students will also find the jimcrowhistory.org web site and various dictionaries and research materials helpful.

Curriculum Standards

For a list of standards that this unit addresses, [click here](#).

Time Required

This should be a long-term assignment that you can break into several different units. The actual research could be one unit with the interview process as a second unit, and production of results a third unit. If you devote class time solely to this project, students could complete it in several weeks according to a block schedule concept. Or, you might better use it as an on-going project, periodically checking to ensure students complete the activity within a grading period.

Materials Needed

- Primary source documents from your area
- Jimcrowhistory.org website
- Copies of the U.S. Constitution, especially the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments
- Brief summaries of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education*. For summaries, see the following website: <http://www.landmarkcases.org/index.html>
- A legal dictionary
- A standard dictionary
- Tape recorders and tapes
- Camera and film

The Lesson

Anticipatory Set

Day 1: To prepare students for the following day's activities, you should take 30 minutes at the close of class to present five to seven photographs depicting segregation as it was practiced in your area. Go to the [Jim Crow Image Gallery](#) for various themed collections, as well as collections exclusive to this site.

Procedures

Day 1:

1. Ask the students to explain how these pictures depict segregation. This could be done either through class discussion or a group activity with each group examining a picture.
2. As they examine the pictures, have students answer the following questions:
 - What information about segregation does your picture reveal?
 - How does the picture relate racial attitude?
 - Why was this picture taken?
 - What does it show that makes it worthy of viewing?
3. Following the discussion, ask students to discuss with a member of their family the practice of segregation as the family member recalls it. So they can prepare for the next day's activities, you should also give students a copy of the summaries of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board* to read.

Day 2:

1. Lead a class discussion allowing students to share information they gathered from their family sources.
2. Introduce the concepts of Jim Crow laws, segregation, integration, and the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.
3. Have the class discuss the Supreme Court rulings in the *Plessy* and *Brown* cases.
4. At this point you will need to determine sources of information regarding the assignment. In our case, we were able to use the "Clinton and the Law" segment from the CBS show *See It Now* hosted by Edward R. Murrow. You may have similar sources of local information that may be used. If not, you will need to locate newspaper, magazine, and other print or video sources for the students to research.

Note to teachers: Before the students begin their research, you may want to have them review an end product of this lesson, in this case, the research of students of Clinton High School in Tennessee. Clinton High School was the first school in the South to desegregate post-*Brown*. Have them read the narratives of people who lived through it, and an **overview essay**, all researched and written by current Clinton High School students.

5. After a briefly introducing the research activity, have students research local involvement in segregation and the integration process using print and video sources from the media center.
6. Based upon the students' research and your direction, have the class generate a list of people and events which warrant additional and extended research.
7. Guide and assist students as they sign up for work in one of the following five group areas with corresponding responsibilities:
 - **Group 1--Timeline:** create a timeline of activities, events, and individuals involved in the local area.

- **Group 2--Essays/articles:** generate in-depth articles and essays of the activities, events, and individuals involved in the local area.
- **Group 3--Interviews:** determine individuals they might interview, arrange for the interviews, develop questions, and conduct the interviews.
- **Group 4--Transcription:** take information from the interviews and generate transcripts, in either interview or narrative form, for the class.
- **Group 5--Production:** determine, develop, and finalize production for the transcribed material. Students could create a written production, a video production, a PowerPoint® presentation, or some other type of presentation for the school and community to use.

8. Make sure that you retain all audiotapes for later reference and that the school library retains other pertinent information.

This lesson was submitted by Larry Gann, a social studies teacher at Clinton High School, in Tennessee.