

# African American Voices Lesson Plans

**Lesson Plan:** *Plessy v. Ferguson and Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*

**Subject:** Civics

**Grade:** 7

**NGSSS-SS :** **SS.7.C.3.12**  
Analyze the significance and outcomes of landmark Supreme Court cases including but not limited to *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*.



**Description/  
Abstract of Lesson:** The students will study the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court ruling and its effects on American life. The students will also study *Brown v. Board of Education*, which reversed the “Separate But Equal” decision.

**Objective(s):**

- Define Civil Rights and cite examples of efforts made to secure these rights for all groups in the United States
- Cite examples of cases brought before the Supreme Court which established precedents for future court decisions; *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education*

**Materials:**

- Textbooks/workbook/handouts
- “Fake” worksheet

**Duration:** 1 - 2 Class Sessions

**Lesson Lead In/  
Opening:**

1. As students enter the classroom, randomly assign some students to the front of the room and some to the back of the room. Assign more students to the back than you actually have seats for but do not allow those students in the back without desks to sit in the front.
2. Pass out a short “fake” worksheet, on information the students have not previously studied. Allow the students in the front of the class to use books or ask questions. DO NOT allow students in the back to use books or ask questions.
3. Collect worksheets, glance at the work quickly and mention that “It appears that all of the students in the front of the class got A’s & B’s on the assignment and all of the students in the back got much lower grades, D’s and F’s.” Allow students to return to their regular seats. This activity should last no more than 10 to 15 minutes.
4. Lead the class into discussion on how it felt to be in the back of the room and how it felt to be in the front of the room.
5. Tie in the students’ experience with the significance of the Supreme Court cases: *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.

**Activity 1:**

1. Ask the students to define or give ideas surrounding the concept of "Civil Rights" according to the students' prior knowledge. Write the ideas on the board.
2. Based on the responses, develop one clear definition for Civil Rights using various student responses. Have the students compare it with the text or dictionary definition of Civil Rights.
3. Ask the students what they believe would happen if we did not have "equal protection under the law." Ask the students "If your civil rights were violated, who would you go to for help?" (Possible answers: NAACP, lawyers, courts, etc.) Engage the class in a discussion about this topic.
4. Have the students read about the Plessy v. Ferguson case (Use document attached).
5. Have the students write a brief a summary of what the Supreme Court decided.
6. Discuss with the students the realities of the "Separate But Equal" ruling. Ask the students if they really expect everything to actually be equal under the law.
7. Show the students the realities of "Separate But Equal" through the images and text provided (either as a transparency or Smart Board image)
8. Have the students read a portion of what the Supreme Court eventually decided in the Brown v. Board of Education case, which reversed the "Separate But Equal" ruling
9. Have the students make believe that they were living during segregation and have them individually write a persuasive letter to their Congressman on why they feel a law should be passed against segregation.

**Assignment 2:**

Have the students interview someone who lived during segregation. Have them write a report on the experience and what they learned.

**Assessment:**

- Check assignments for grammar, accuracy of information and neatness.
- Letters should include appropriate heading and structure of an actual letter.

**Higher Order Thinking Questions:**

1. What problems might you experience if your rights to publicly go anywhere you please were taken away from you?
2. Would everything be okay if things were actually "separate and equal?"

3. From what you see in these images, what are some of the main problems with segregation?
4. How would you expect many white southerners to have responded to the Brown v. Board of Education case?
5. Do we still have segregation today? How do you know?
6. Describe the attitudes of the people standing by the lynching as shown in the picture.

**Suggested Books  
In Lesson:**

Woodward, C. V. (2001) The Strange Career of Jim Crow, Oxford University Press.

Massey, D. & Denton, N. (1998) American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass, Harvard University Press.

Tushnet, M. V. (1994) Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936 – 1961 , New York: Oxford University Press.

**Web Resources:**

**More images of and information on segregation/lynching**

[www.jimcrowhistory.org](http://www.jimcrowhistory.org)

[www.americanlynching.com/main.html](http://www.americanlynching.com/main.html)

<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingsstate.html>