Lesson Plan: The Little Rock Nine

Grades: High School
Subject: U.S. History, English Language Arts
Time Required: 1 50-minute class periods
Author: Teaching with Primary Sources—MTSU

OVERVIEW
The desegregation of Little Rock’s Central High School caught national attention when Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus deployed the Arkansas National Guard to prevent African American students from entering the school. The fight to allow those students to attend Central lasted much longer than those first weeks. The Little Rock Nine faced violence and intimidation throughout the school year in their quest to get an equal education.

UNDERSTANDING GOAL
Students will understand the significance of the desegregation of Central High School, be able to identify the key figures involved, and discuss the different types of harassment the Little Rock Nine faced during the school year.

OBJECTIVES
Students will read and analyze multiple primary sources related to the desegregation of Little Rock’s Central High School. Students will also compare and contrast these sources in a class discussion to answer the investigative question.

CURRICULUM STANDARDS
U.S. History
US.80 Describe the significant events in the struggle to secure civil rights for African Americans, including: Montgomery Bus Boycott, Integration of Clinton High School in Clinton, TN, Integration of Central High School in Little Rock, AR, Freedom Riders, Tent City in Fayette County, TN, Marches, demonstrations, boycotts, and sit-ins (e.g., Nashville), March on Washington, D.C., Birmingham bombings of 1963, Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Highlander Folk School.

INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION
What role did the Little Rock Nine play in the civil rights movement?

CURRICULUM STANDARDS CONTINUED
English Language Arts
11-12.RI.KID.2 Determine multiple central ideas of a text or texts and analyze their development; provide a critical summary.
9-10.RI.KID.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development; provide an objective or critical summary.
11-12.RI.KID.3 Analyze how an author’s choices regarding the ordering of ideas and events, the introduction and development of ideas, and connections among ideas impact meaning.
9-10.RI.KID.3 Analyze how an author presents and develops key ideas and events to impact meaning.
11-12.RI.IKI.9 Analyze and evaluate a variety of thematically-related texts of historical and literary significance for their topics, facts, purposes, and rhetorical features.
Curriculum Standards continued

9-10.RI.1.RI.9 Analyze a variety of thematically related texts of historical and literary significance for the way they address related topics, facts, and concepts.

11-12.SL.CC.1 Initiate and participate effectively with varied partners in a range of collaborative discussions on appropriate 11th-12th grade topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing one’s own clearly and persuasively.

9-10.SL.CC.1 Initiate and participate effectively with varied partners in a range of collaborative discussions on appropriate 9th-10th grade topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing one’s own clearly and persuasively.

Desegregation landmark: Little Rock Central High School, Little Rock, Arkansas [between 1980 and 2006]

Materials

- Stop signs for each student
- Easel Pad or White Board

Resources

- 60 years on, A Look Back at the Little Rock Nine (video)
- Daisy Bates Background
- Warriors Don’t Cry Excerpt

Procedure

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<td>1</td>
<td>Have students pair up and spend two minutes fact-storming what they know about the Little Rock Nine and the desegregation of Central High School. At the end of the allotted time, have students share aloud some of their facts.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Introduce the investigative question to students. You may wish to display the question on the white board to keep it fresh in their minds as they move through the lesson.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>To build additional background knowledge on the topic, have students watch a short YouTube video “60 Years On, A Look Back at the Little Rock Nine.” Ask students to add to their original list of notes from the fact-storming as they watch the video.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Next share background on Daisy Bates and her role in the desegregation of Central High School. Also share information on the background of her December 17, 1957 letter to Roy Wilkins.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Distribute copies of page one of the Bates letter. Ask students to read the letter quietly. As they read, have them circle words or phrases that are unfamiliar. Discuss any words or phrases that students have identified.</td>
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PROCEDURE (cont.)

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<th>Step 6</th>
<th>Ask students to read the letter again. This time students should underline key points in the text. They should write any questions they have in the margins. Annotating is very important here as it will be key to the next step in this exercise.</th>
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<td>Step 7</td>
<td>Distribute stop signs to each student and introduce the rules of “Ok, Stop.” The teacher or a designated student will be reading an excerpt from <em>Warriors Don’t Cry</em>. During the reading, students should hold up Stop sign to pause reading to draw connection to points made in the Daisy Bates letter or to ask questions. During student comments, other students may hold up their signs to respond to comments before reading resumes. You may choose to provide students with a copy of the excerpt to read prior to the read aloud. The goal of this activity is to have students draw connections between the two primary source texts and use the texts to address the investigative question.</td>
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<td>Step 8</td>
<td>Have students write a short essay at the end of class to answer the investigative question. Their response should draw on all the source material, their fact-storming notes, and discussion during “Ok, Stop.”</td>
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EXTENSION

- Assign students different members of the Little Rock Nine and explore what happened to them after the 1957-58 school year. How did being a member of the Little Rock Nine shape their lives?
- Have students research the desegregation of Clinton High School in Clinton, TN. How do these two events compare?
- Have students research the desegregation of their school or school district. This may include interviewing students or teachers who experienced desegregation effort in your local area.

EVALUATION

- 50% Participation in “Ok, Stop”
- 30% Short essay
- 20% Annotation of Bates letter

Little Rock, 1959. Mob marching from capitol to Central High [1959 August 20]
Newspapers across the country started carrying a series of articles and profiles on the nine of us. Central High segregationists used the details to taunt us. The articles gave specific information on what our homes were like, our backgrounds, our hobbies, our aspirations—all there was to know about us. Students didn’t let up for one minute, chirping on about my folks, my mother’s teaching, and things I considered personal and sacred.

When the nine of us compared notes, we discovered we were all facing an increasing barrage of injurious activities. What was noticeably different was the frequency and the organized pattern of harassment. Teams of students appeared to be assigned specific kinds of torture. One team concentrated on slamming us into lockers, while another focused on tripping us up or shoving us down staircases; still another concentrated on attacks with weapons. Another group must have been told to practice insidious harassment inside the classrooms. Still others worked at entrapment, luring the boys into dark corners or the girls into tight spots in isolated passageways. Some continued to use the showers as a means of abuse.

At the same time I was feeling alarmed about rumors of segregationist training programs to sharpen the skills of hooligans inside school. I was also increasingly worried about Minnijean. She was waging yet another battle with school officials to get permission to appear with the choral group in the Christmas program. No matter how much Thelma and I tried to convince her to let go of the idea, she wouldn’t give up the notion that if she could perform, somehow the white students would see she was talented and therefore accept her.

I fretted about Minnijean as I plunged into my birthday party plans, but the more I tried to console her, the less she listened. She was the only one of my eight Central friends I had invited to my party, because I wanted to escape all thoughts of being an integration person. I made her promise not to talk about Central in front of our Horace Mann friends.

Not inviting the others made me feel guilty; but had the eight come, I knew I would have been separate—one of the Little Rock Nine and not just plain Melba, a member of my old group. I counted on reconnecting to my friends from my former school. I wanted them to accept me, to take me back into their fold.

*This section is from chapter 12 pages 142-143 in the 1995 edition.*