Lesson Plan: Comparing Experiences— the Clinton Twelve and the Little Rock Nine

Overview:
The Supreme Court handed down their landmark decision for the Brown vs. Board of Education case in May 1954. The decision declared that “separate but equal” violated the equal protection clause in the Fourteenth Amendment and was therefore unconstitutional. After the decision, schools all across the nation were challenged to begin the school desegregation process. Clinton High School in east Tennessee and Little Rock’s Central High School were two of the first schools to desegregate. The African American students who entered these two previously all-white schools were referred to as the Clinton Twelve and the Little Rock Nine. They suffered constant abuse and continuously battled hate and racism throughout their time at Clinton High School and Little Rock’s Central High School. This lesson plan can be used as a companion lesson to other Civil Rights lesson plans from Teaching with Primary Sources—MTSU.

Investigative Question:
How did the Clinton Twelve and the Little Rock Nine impact the modern Civil Rights movement? How did the experiences of these two group of students compare?

Understanding Goal:
- Students will understand the impact of the Clinton Twelve and the Little Rock Nine on the modern Civil Rights movement.
- Students will compare how the desegregation of Clinton High School and Little Rock’s Central High School impacted future generations.

Objectives:
- Students will use prior knowledge of the modern Civil Rights movement to draw conclusions and make connections between the students of the Clinton Twelve and the Little Rock Nine.
- Students will analyze and observe and discuss multiple primary sources in order to better place the Clinton Twelve and the Little Rock Nine in context with modern Civil Rights movement.
- Students will engage with the readings and materials discussed by writing a Found Poem to tell a true story about the school desegregation experience of the Clinton Twelve and/or the Little Rock Nine.

Clinton, TN. School integration conflicts. [1956]
Curriculum Standards:

High School 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

High School African American History:

- **AAH.42** Summarize the Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee, including: the **integration of Clinton High School**, sit-ins in Nashville, and the activities of Diane Nash and Jim Lawson.

English Language Arts:

- **11-12.L.CSE.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking; consider complex and contested matters of usage and context.

- **11-12.L.KL.3** Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening; consult references for guidance; and apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts.

- **11-12.RI.KID.1** Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; support an interpretation of a text by citing and synthesizing relevant textual evidence from multiple sources.

- **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.

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**Clinton, TN. School integration conflicts.** [1956]

**Materials:**

- Stop signs for each student
- Notecards
- Paper/pencils for found poems

**Resources:**

- Found Poem **Instructions and Rubric**
- **Synthesizing Sources Worksheet**
- Daisy Bates **Letter**
- “A Complication” (Pages 9-10)
- **Warriors Don’t Cry excerpt**
- “The Big Things”

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**Little Rock, 1959. Mob marching from capitol to Central High School / [JTB].** [1959]
Lesson Procedure:

This lesson plan can be used after students have been introduced to the modern Civil Rights movement and the desegregation attempts of the Clinton Twelve and the Little Rock Nine.

Lesson Procedure:

Step 1: Estimated time—15 minutes
Pass out/introduce the synthesizing sources worksheet to students before distributing the readings. Put students in small groups and ask them to analyze and answer the questions using the excerpt “A Complication,” (pages 9-10) and the Daisy Bates letter. Ask students to share their answers and discuss the sources as a class.

Step 2: Estimated time—10 minutes
Pass out the Warriors Don’t Cry excerpt and the “The Big Things” excerpt from Promise of Change and ask students to follow along as the teacher reads through the documents. Ask students to make notes on their synthesizing sources sheet for the two new documents.

Step 3: Estimated time—15 minutes
Next, 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 Warriors Don’t Cry. During the reading, students should hold up Stop sign to pause reading to draw connection to points made in the other readings or to ask questions. During student comments, other students may hold up their signs to respond to comments before reading resumes.

After reading the Warriors Don’t Cry excerpt as a class during the “Ok, Stop” activity, do the same activity with the excerpt “The Big Things.” During the reading, students should hold up Stop sign to pause reading to make connections to any of the sources they have read or discussed today or to ask questions. Once again, during student comments, other students may hold up their signs to respond to comments before reading resumes.

The goal of this activity is to have students draw connections between primary source texts and use the texts to address the investigative question.

Step 3: Estimated time—20 minutes
After discussing all four sources and completing the “Ok, Stop” activity, students will be instructed to write a found poem using the excerpts read in class. The found poem instructions and a sample rubric are provided on the next page of this lesson plan.
Found Poem Instructions:

Teacher preparation and materials needed:

Each student will need:
- 15-20 notecards (notecards can be cut in half if needed)
- Scissors
- Glue or glue sticks
- Construction or copy paper to glue final poem.

Before passing out materials:
Explain to students that they will be creating a found poem using all four of the readings. A found poem involves students piecing together words and/or phrases from all of the sources read and discussed to create poem. The found poem for this specific assignment will need to tell a true story about the school desegregation experience of the Clinton Twelve and the Little Rock Nine. Students will follow the found poem rules in order to create poems on note cards, cut out their poem on the note cards, and glue their found poem on to the paper (construction or copy) provided.

Display the assignment rules for students as they work on their found poem:
1. Your poem should tell a true story about the school desegregation experience of the Clinton Twelve and/or the Little Rock Nine. Do not rearrange the words to make untrue statements.
2. You may choose to remove phrases on index cards if you change your mind.
3. You may repeat words and phrases to add impact.
4. You may not add any other words aside from what was directly in today’s readings.
5. Your poem does not have to rhyme

Use the following rubric to grade student work:
90-100:
The entire poem is related to the assignment. Student followed free verse format and created a poem which tells an accurate story of the experiences of the Clinton Twelve and the Little Rock Nine. Student included important phrases and keywords. Student used all transcripts. No spelling errors. Student stayed on task the entire time.

80-89:
Some of the poem is off topic, student did not follow all directions or format, few spelling errors. Student was off task for some of the class time.

70-79:
The poem presents untrue information, or very limited information. Many careless spelling errors. Student was off task for much of the class time.

69 & Below:
Student put forth little effort, veered greatly from directions, or no attempt was made to relate the poem to the assigned topic.
Found Poetry Example 1:

   It’s the big things…
   That grow from the little things.
   Waging yet another battle…
   Integration person.
   The fun stuff is whites only.
   If she could perform…
   The white students would see.
   Accept her…
   There will be no “mixed social events.”
   That’s that.
   And they feel…
   Kicking, spitting, and general abuse.
   Waging yet another battle…
   Integration person.
   We’ll go to school.
   Treatment of the children…
   Monstrous.
   Frequency and the organized pattern of harassment…
   Steadily worse.
   We’ll leave school.
   Escape.
   Waging yet another battle…
   Integration person.
   From the little slights…
   Come the larger evils.

*Found poem example by Layla Smallwood, Teaching with Primary Sources – MTSU*
Found Poetry Example 2:

Keep White Schools White,

We’re in.. but it’s complicated.

No “mixed social events,”

But it’s more than that.

The hooligans sharpen their skills:

Kicking, spitting, abuse,

Bloody heels-

Monstrous.

Coon. Go Home.

We were free-

The white kids who hate us are up close now.

I counted on reconnecting to my friends from my former school-

That’s the complication.

Found poem example by Jaimie Akins, Educator, Union County High School
Found Poetry Example 3:

Letters, Letters, Letters
Poems, Poems, Poems
Why? Why? Why?
Is color so divisive
Numbers, Numbers, Numbers
   I am 9 or
   I am 12
Education, Education, Education
   9 or 12
   I want to learn.
Resistance, Resistance, Resistance
Why are my white schoolmates so afraid?
   I am a student too!

Found poem example by John Mallick, Educator, John Sevier Middle School
Mr. Roy Wilkins  
20 West 40th Street  
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Wilkins:

Conditions are yet pretty rough in the school for the children. Last week, Minnie Jean's mother, Mrs. W. B. Brown, asked me to go over to the school with her for a conference with the principal, and the two assistant principals. Subject of conference: "A firmer disciplinary measure, and the withdrawal of Minnie Jean from the glee club's Christmas program." The principal had informed Minnie Jean in withdrawing her from the program that "When it is definitely decided that Negroes will go to school here with the whites, and the troops are removed, then you will be able to participate in all activities." We strongly challenged this statement, which he denied making in that fashion.

We also pointed out that the treatment of the children had been getting steadily worse for the last two weeks in the form of kicking, spitting, and general abuse. As a result of our visit, stronger measures are being taken against the white students who are guilty of committing these offenses. For instance, a boy who had been suspended for two weeks, flunked both six-weeks tests, and on his return to school, the first day he knocked Gloria Ray into her locker. As a result of our visit, he was given an indefinite suspension.

The superintendent of schools also requested a conference the same afternoon. Clarence and I went down and spent about two hours. Here, again, we pointed out that a three-day suspension given Hugh Williams for a sneak attack perpetrated on one of the Negro boys which knocked him out, and required a doctor's attention, was not sufficient punishment. We also informed him that our investigation revealed that there were many pupils willing to help if given the opportunity, and that President Eisenhower was very much concerned about the Little Rock crisis. He has stated his willingness to come down and address the student body if invited by student leaders of the school. This information was passed on to the principals of the school, but we have not been assured that leadership would be given to children in the school who are willing to organize for law and order. However, we have not abandoned the idea. Last Friday, the 13th, I was asked to call Washington and see if we could get FBI men placed in the school December 16-18.
Excerpt from The Promise of Change
By Debbie Levy and Jo Ann Allen Boyce

A COMPLICATION

We’re in, yes
But its more complicated than that.
Or, looked at another way — it’s simpler./
Our lives at Clinton High School will be
Small.
We’ll go to school.
We’ll leave school./

While we’re choosing classes with Mrs. Anderson,
Our parents are asking Principal Brittain some questions.
May our children play on sports teams against other schools?
   No, because those other schools are white./
May our children enjoy social events at school —
   Mixer, sock hops, parties?
   No, because the other students are white.
   There will be no “mixed social events.”
   You may come to our school.
   The principal says,
Because that is what the law requires,
   But you’ll stay in your group,
   And we’ll stay in ours.
We’ll go to school.
We’ll leave school.
Just like we do now at Austin High,
Where none of the other students is white
And we’re free
To join sports teams and after-school clubs,
Attend pep rallies and football games —
Except nor really free,
Because when that bus leaves Knoxville
To drive twenty miles back to Clinton
At the end of the school day,
That’s that.
Its not coming back until the next morning./
You can’t stay after school
When you have no ride home.
Glee club, football, cheerleading?
No, no, and no./
You can’t stay after school,
When the fun stuff is whites-only.
Glee club, football, cheerleading?
No, no, and no.
Simple. That’s the complication./

“In discussing the social activities Mr. Brittain said he told the parents of the negro students ‘we are not going to have mixed social events. You may come, but you must stay with your own group and we will stay in ours…. We think the community should know that we are following the orders of the courts. We believe that loyal Americans must always do so….””

“Clinton High Plans for Integration,”
Clinton Courier-News, August 9, 1956

This excerpt can be found in Promise of Change on page 52-54.
Excerpt from *Warriors Don’t Cry*

By Melba Pattillo Beals

THE NINE WHO DARED—New York Post, Thursday, December 5, 1957

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 Minnie Jean. 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 Minnie Jean 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.*
Excerpt from *The Promise of Change*

By Debbie Levy and Jo Ann Allen Boyce

THE BIG THINGS

It’s the big things

That grow from the little things:

The little shoves

That become

The shove that almost knocks Gail Ann out of the window

From the second floor of the school building,

The little paper spitballs

That become

Paper notes with obscene messages

That become

A bathroom wall with “**Coon. Go home.**”

The muttered comments

That become

**KEEP WHITE SCHOOLS WHITE**

On big bold buttons

Worn by girls and boys right here in school

Who call themselves the

“**Tennessee White Youth**”

Inspired by John Kasper,

Now out of jail.

Where once they kept their distance,

The white kids who hate us

Are up close now, hard on our heels —

Gail Ann’s are bloody.

From the little slights

Come the larger evils,

And they feel

Monstrous

This excerpt can be found in *Promise of Change* on page 192-193.
Little Rock Nine and Daisy Bates posed in living room [c.1957-1960]

Additional Links:

- The Clinton 12 — TPS-MTSU Lesson Plan
- The Little Rock Nine — TPS-MTSU Lesson Plan
- Beginnings of a Movement — TPS-MTSU Primary Source Set
- Dawn of the Modern Civil Rights Movement — TPS-MTSU Primary Source Set
- Green McAdoo Cultural Center
- Facts on how integration came to Clinton — Tennessee Virtual Archives
- Clinton 12 students’ reactions
- Brown V. Board at Fifty: “With an Even Hand” — Exhibition