

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Month: Jan.

Week #: 19

Day: d. Thur. Time: 30 - 40

# Linda Brown & Ruby Bridges

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**Objectives/Aims**

The students will: understand the events that led up to desegregation; realize that children can also play an important role in history

**Materials**

photo of a segregated class, the painting, 'The Problem We All Live With' (both in CG) and the book, 'The Story of Ruby Bridges'

**Picture**

Do you see any white students in this picture? No, there aren't any whites because because it's 1953 and this is a racially segregated school. The girl sitting front and center is Linda Brown. I wonder how she got to school each day?



Segregated school, Kansas, 1953

**Background**

The following information is from: Cozzens, Lisa. "Brown v. Board of Education." *African American History*. <http://fledge.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/early-civilrights/brown.html> (May 25, 1998).

“In the early 1950's, racial segregation in public schools was the norm across America.

Although all the schools in a given district were supposed to be equal, most black schools were far inferior to their white counterparts.

In Topeka, Kansas, a black third-grader named Linda Brown had to walk one mile through a railroad switchyard to get to her black elementary school, even though a white elementary school was only seven blocks away. Linda's father, Oliver Brown, tried to enroll her in the white elementary school, but the principal of the school refused. Brown went to McKinley Burnett, the head of Topeka's branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and asked for help. The NAACP was eager to assist the Browns, as it had long wanted to challenge segregation in public schools. With Brown's complaint, it had "the right plaintiff at the right time." Other black parents joined Brown, and, in 1951, the NAACP requested an injunction that would forbid the segregation of Topeka's public schools.”

After being unsuccessful at The U.S. District Court for the District of Kansas which was held from June 25-26, 1951, the NAACP appealed to the Supreme Court: (Below same source citation as above)

“On May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren read the decision of the unanimous Court:

"We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other

### **Background (continued)**

"tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does... We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

The Supreme Court struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy* for public education, ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, and required the desegregation of schools across America. The Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision did not abolish segregation in other public areas, such as restaurants and restrooms, nor did it require desegregation of public schools by a specific time. It did, however, declare the permissive or mandatory segregation that existed in 21 states unconstitutional. It was a giant step towards complete desegregation of public schools. Even partial desegregation of these schools, however, was still very far away, as would soon become apparent."

### **Group Activity**

1. Show, or pass around, the picture of Linda Brown sitting with her classmates and ask the following questions:

1. When and where do you think this picture was taken?

A: 1953, in Topeka, Kansas at an all-black elementary school

2. What do you notice about it?

A: Whatever the student's answers, lead them to fact that in 1953 all public schools were segregated, meaning 'colored' students could not go to the same school as white students. Give a brief synopsis of the above 'Background Information' about Linda Brown that is appropriate to the developmental ages of your students.

2. Show, or pass around, the picture of Norman Rockwell's painting, 'The Problem We All Live With' and ask the following questions:

1. What do you see in this picture?

A: A little girl walking in the middle of four large men. (The teacher can add that the little girl was only six years old at the time. The men were federal marshals).

2. Why were the four men there? Give reasons for your answer.

A: They were there to protect her. There's a smashed tomato on the ground and a racial epithet on the wall. (Note: The students need to understand that the word 'nigger' is a derogatory term. However, it is sometimes used by African Americans adults with a different social connotation. It is unacceptable for a non-black person to use this term.)

3. Where do you think she's going? Give supporting evidence.

A: She's going to school because she is dressed neatly and she's carrying a book and ruler.

4. Why do you think she needs protection if she's only going to school? I also wonder why Norman Rockwell entitled his painting, 'The Problem We All Live With'?

3. Say, "To answer these last two questions, we'll read the book, "The Story of Ruby Bridges", by Professor Robert Coles. After reading the book, we'll answer the last two questions.

### **Variations/Extensions**

1. Conduct a skit/interview between Charlayne Hunter-Gault & Ruby Bridges. The dialogue and pictures can be found at: [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/race\\_relations/jan-june97/bridges\\_2-18.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/race_relations/jan-june97/bridges_2-18.html).

### **Conclusion**

Say, "Ruby Bridges was a first grade girl and Linda Brown was a third grade girl. They were both young students like many of you are (or were not long ago) and yet they both played a role in history, a role that changed things for the better. Ruby Bridges, especially, was an exceptional little girl. She might have been little physically, but she was a giant when it came to her faith and courage."

Jan. 19 d. Thur.

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**1964 Norman Rockwell painting "The Problem We All Live With"**