

## **Desegregation in America – How Everyday People Made a Difference**

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### **Introduction**

My unit of study uses children’s literature to illustrate the lives of everyday people and the roles they played to enact change during the civil rights era. When deciding which stories would resonate with my eight and nine-year-old students and represent the concepts I want them to understand, I chose to move beyond the stories of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks. According to the seminar syllabus, an area of focus should be “...the contributions of activists beyond the established heroes of the movement.” Not only are the stories of Ruby Bridges, the Greensboro Four and Jackie Robinson clear illustrations of the struggles that everyday people had to endure to make changes during the era of segregation, but are also stories of high interest to people of all ages. My students will be able to associate with these heroes even though the events of the stories happened long ago. They will be able to make connections with the settings of the stories: a restaurant, a sporting event, and a school. There are many children’s books that chronicle these events and describe the courageous characters. My unit concentrates on: The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles, Through My Eyes by Ruby Bridges, Sit-in – How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down by Andrea Davis Pinkney, Freedom on the Menu – The Greensboro Sit –Ins by Carole Boston Weatherford, and Teammates – How Two Men Changed the Face of Baseball by Peter Golenbock. The last story of my unit is Wings by Christopher Myers – a modern piece of fiction that demonstrates the need to practice tolerance in today’s world.

By the end of the unit, my students will understand: the meaning of the words tolerance, intolerance, segregation, integration; the effects of segregation practices on children and their families; the roles that everyday people played to change those practices – specifically the roles of Ruby Bridges, David Richmond, Joseph McNeil, Franklyn McCain, Ezell Blair Jr., and Jackie Robinson; the similarities and differences between their lives and the lives of the people who lived under the rules of segregation; their responsibility to show tolerance toward others

### **Rationale**

A 2011 report titled “Teaching the Movement: The State of Civil Rights in the United States 2011” highlighted the findings of a study released by the Southern Poverty Law Center. The study found that “Across the country, state history standards...routinely ignored or over-simplified the struggle for African American civil rights that took place in the 1950s and 1960s.”<sup>1</sup> The report went on to say that it is the responsibility of teachers and states to “be better prepared to teach the movement and... to integrate a comprehensive approach to civil rights education into their curricula.”<sup>2</sup> Third graders at

my school would certainly struggle to understand the complexity of the traditions, policies and politics that have denied African-Americans their rights throughout history. They would, however, be able to relate to stories about everyday people who bravely challenged these policies and traditions to bring about change.

The Delaware History Standards state that in grades K-3, students will: understand that American citizens have distinct responsibilities, rights, and privileges (civics K-3d), develop an understanding of the similarities and differences between families now and in the past (history K-3a), and develop an awareness of major events and people in the United States (history K-3b). Despite the fact that the third grade history standards state that students will have an understanding of past events and how these events have shaped the present, the students I work with seem to know very little about the civil rights movement in America and how their lives are different because of it. Beyond the mention of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks every February, the elementary curriculum does not address this gap in my students' knowledge. A unit of study that uses children's stories about the civil rights era to illustrate the concepts of human rights and the challenges of African-American families in a segregated society is an appropriate and exciting way to teach my students an important part of American history and how that history relates to their lives.

### **School Demographics**

Highlands Elementary School is located in the city of Wilmington, Delaware. There are 350 students spanning grades kindergarten through five. Most students are bused from different neighborhoods within a 1 -3 mile radius of the school. Of the 350 children, 50% are African American, 35% are Latino, and 12% are Caucasian. Although it sits in one of the most affluent neighborhoods of the city, Highlands faces many of the same challenges as other urban schools around the country. 85% of our students live in poverty, 10% receive special education services, and 7% are English language learners.<sup>3</sup>

I have been a special education teacher at Highlands for 23 years. I work with students throughout all grades who struggle with reading and math concepts. All of my children have been identified with some type of learning disability and function at least one year below their peers. Even though they work below grade level, it is important that I expose them to grade level concepts and materials and give them opportunities to work within the regular classroom as much as possible. I team-teach with classroom teachers throughout the day as well as take students to my room for small – group instruction. For the 2013 – 2014 school year, part of my day will be spent teaching a small group of third graders in a separate setting for one hour during their ELA block. During this time, I have the flexibility to develop units of study that incorporate third grade ELA Common Core Standards.

### **Historical Background**

## Federal Laws

During the era of reconstruction, after the Civil War had ended, there were many attempts at the federal level to ensure the freedoms for which the war had been fought. The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment adopted in 1865, abolished slavery and involuntary servitude. The 1866 Civil Rights Act was passed, despite a veto by President Andrew Johnson, in response to selective enforcement of laws, white supremacist violence, and Black Codes that continued to infringe upon the rights of newly freed slaves. This act granted citizenship to all persons born in the United States without regard to race, color, or previous condition. As citizens, African Americans would be able to give evidence in court, inherit, purchase and sell property, and make contracts. Democrats in Congress, along with President Johnson, claimed the Civil Rights Act unconstitutional and stated that it “invaded the right of the states to define state citizenship, protect rights, and determine the day-to-day relationships among human beings.”<sup>4</sup> In response to the congressional objections to the Act and to ensure citizenship rights for all, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified in 1868. This amendment stated that, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.”<sup>5</sup> According to constitutional historian Michael Les Benedict, “even with the ratification of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Republicans knew that the federal government would be hard pressed to protect the rights of people against state governments determined to restrict them.”<sup>6</sup> Many members of Congress understood the necessity of having state leaders dedicated to equal rights and believed that giving black men the right to vote would create local governments committed to protecting the rights of all citizens.<sup>7</sup> The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, ratified in 1870, guaranteed that the right to vote “shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”<sup>8</sup>

The Civil Rights Act of 1875, a law that would become the last civil rights legislation passed until 1957, was an attempt to guarantee equal access of public facilities to all citizens. It stated that, “... all persons within the jurisdiction of the United States shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns, public conveyances on land or water, theaters, and other places of public amusement... and applicable alike to citizens of every race and color, regardless of any previous condition of servitude.”<sup>9</sup> This act was rarely enforced and by 1883, five cases (collectively known as the Civil Rights Cases) claiming discrimination practices in hotels, theatres, and train cars came before the Supreme Court. In October of the same year, the Supreme Court ruled the 1875 act unconstitutional and declared that the Fourteenth Amendment did not prohibit discrimination by private individuals or businesses.<sup>10</sup>

The Supreme Court’s decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) further eroded the protection from discrimination afforded to blacks by the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. In 1890,

Louisiana passed the Separate Car Act which legally segregated the train cars of the East Louisiana Railroad. The Citizens Committee of New Orleans and Homer Plessy challenged the law and in 1892, Plessy was arrested and convicted for sitting in the “white” car of the train. In 1896, after hearing his case, the Supreme Court decided that “separate but equal” facilities for railroad passengers of different races did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment. Plessy v Ferguson “established the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine that would become the constitutional basis for segregation.”<sup>11</sup>

### Jim Crow Laws

Even after the ratification of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments abolishing slavery and guaranteeing rights for people of all races, laws that intended to keep races segregated were enacted and enforced at the state level. “From Delaware to California, and from North Dakota to Texas, many states (and cities, too) could impose legal punishments on people for consorting with members of another race.”<sup>12</sup> These segregation laws, commonly known as Jim Crow laws (named after a 19<sup>th</sup> century minstrel character) were imposed on African Americans between 1877 and the mid-1960s and restricted them in every aspect of their lives.<sup>13</sup> Railroads, buses, taxis, housing, hospitals, public libraries, restaurants, and schools were all subject to strict Jim Crow laws. There were restrictions on recreational areas. Parks, pool rooms, baseball fields, and swimming areas were segregated. “In many cities and towns, African Americans were not allowed to share a taxi with whites or enter a building through the same entrance. They had to drink from separate water fountains, use separate restrooms, attend separate schools, and even swear on separate Bibles and be buried in separate cemeteries.”<sup>14</sup>

As well as the Jim Crow laws, there were etiquette norms that all African Americans were expected to follow. White motorists had the right-of-way at all intersections. Black people were expected to step aside to let a white person pass. Black men could not look any white woman in the eye. Blacks and whites were not supposed to eat together. Blacks had to use titles such as Mr., Mrs., Miss, Sir, Ma’am when referring to whites but whites did not use the same titles when referring to blacks. If a black person rode in a car or truck driven by a white person, the black person was expected to sit in the backseat or in the back of the truck.<sup>15</sup> African Americans lived in constant fear of reprisal for perceived disobedience or, often unfounded, accusations of wrong doing. They feared employers who threatened to fire them, white citizens’ councils who threatened loss of job, home, or even life, and vigilante groups such as the Ku Klux Klan who “exerted an often-unchecked reign of terror across the South.”<sup>16</sup>

Despite intimidation, threats, and violence, many African Americans risked jobs, homes, and lives to fight the laws and rules of segregation. Over the years, organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (organized in 1909), the Congress of Racial Equality (organized in 1942), the Southern Christian

Leadership Conference (organized in 1957), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (organized in 1960) formed. They raised funds, organized local protests, provided legal counsel for jailed demonstrators, organized voter drives, and tested segregation and discrimination in the courts.<sup>17</sup> Black churches became centers of political activism. Student groups from colleges and universities across the country challenged segregation laws by organizing sit-ins.<sup>18</sup> Just as important were the individuals who fought for change in America during the Civil Rights Era. Among them: a baseball executive and a talented Negro League player who recognized the importance of integrated sports, a family from New Orleans brave enough to send their six year old daughter to a newly integrated school, and four college students who became tired of talking about segregation and decided to act.

### Integration of Baseball

After the Civil War, the sport of baseball became very popular in America. Even though The National Association of Base Ball, formed in 1867, recommended that black athletes be banned from competing on white teams, at least sixty black players could be found in the minor leagues in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> John “Bud” Fowler, Moses “Fleetwood” Walker, George Stovey, William Edward White, and Frank Grant all played in the white leagues in the 1880s. Life was difficult for the black athletes who made the minor league teams. All black players suffered discrimination and harassment on and off the field. According to a white teammate, Bud Fowler “used to play second base with the lower part of his legs encased in wooden guards. He knew that about every player that came down to second base on a steal had it in for him and would, if possible, throw spikes into him”<sup>20</sup> In 1887, Fowler was released from the International League even though through thirty games his batting average was .350 and he had stolen thirty bases. League directors stated that they had received complaints that “many of the best players in the League were anxious to leave on account of the colored element.”<sup>21</sup> Black baseball players found it difficult to gain acceptance in organized baseball. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when separation of the races was law in the south and custom in the North, baseball had become as segregated as the country.<sup>22</sup>

During the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several black baseball clubs began to emerge throughout the country and, by the end of World War I, had become a major source of entertainment for urban black populations.<sup>23</sup> By 1923, three negro leagues had been formed: the Negro National League with teams such as the Chicago Giants, the Cuban Stars, and the Indianapolis ABCs, the Negro Southern League which included the Montgomery Grey Sox, the Atlanta Black Crackers, and the Nashville White Sox, and the Eastern Colored League featuring the Baltimore Black Sox, the Brooklyn Royal Giants, and the Lincoln Giants.<sup>24</sup> By the 1930s, many powerful teams such as the Pittsburgh Crawfords and the Homestead Grays played each other for Negro League baseball titles. Every year throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the East-West All Star Game

was played at Chicago's Comiskey Park, which showcased the Negro League's best athletes.

During the heyday of the Negro Leagues, some of baseball's finest players, including Josh Gibson, Rube Foster, Cool Papa Bell, Oscar Charleston, Satchel Paige, and Judy Johnson were heroes to African-American fans throughout the country. Baseball players in the Negro Leagues usually earned between \$125 and \$300 a month, less than half the salary of most white players. Barnstorming became an important way for teams and their players to make extra money during the off-season. Teams would travel to small towns to play other teams and entertain fans. "When a major league barnstorming team appeared, towns took on a festive air. Businesses closed, schools might be given a half-holiday, and parades welcomed the Olympian visitors."<sup>25</sup> The barnstorming teams would play local semi-pro teams, other teams from the Negro Leagues, or teams made up of major league all-stars. These games gave black players the chance to show off their talents. According to baseball great Judy Johnson, "That's when we played the hardest, to let them know, and to let the public know that we had the same talent they did and probably a little better lots of times."<sup>26</sup> In 1934 and 1935, when Satchel Paige toured with Dizzy Dean, who was thought to be the best white pitcher in professional baseball, Paige won the majority of the contests. The well-publicized games in which Satchel Paige played made fans, sportswriters, and baseball officials aware of the talented black baseball players.<sup>27</sup>

In 1904, when Branch Rickey was a young baseball coach at Ohio Wesleyan University, he experienced the effects of racism that haunted him for many years and may have influenced his ideas about segregation. The college baseball team traveled to South Bend, Indiana, to play Notre Dame. The hotel where the team was staying refused lodging to Charlie Thomas, a black first baseman on the team. Rickey convinced the hotel management to allow Thomas to sleep on a cot in his room, as a servant might do. That night, Rickey witnessed Thomas crying and rubbing his hands, saying, "Damned skin! Damned skin! If only I could rub it off."<sup>28</sup> When Branch Rickey became the general manager of the St. Louis Cardinals in the 1920s, he had to put his ideas about integration on the back burner. "I had made that effort in St. Louis only to find the effective opposition on the part of ownership and on the part of the public, press - everybody." He went on to say that St. Louis would not easily break with Jim Crow.<sup>29</sup> In 1942, Rickey moved to New York and became the president and part owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers. New York, in contrast to St. Louis, was a city where a growing number of people were demanding integration. In 1945, the Quinn-Ives Act was passed by the New York legislature, banning discrimination in hiring. This was soon followed by a Fair Employment Practices Act. The mayor of New York City, Fiorello La Guardia, made integration in baseball part of his re-election campaign and called for an end to segregation.<sup>30</sup> In 1943, Rickey began the effort to recruit black ballplayers for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He secretly sent scouts across the country to search for talented athletes. By the middle of 1945, the search began to focus on one baseball player. He

was a talented and intelligent athlete who had impressed Rickey's scouts with his pride, toughness and strength of character.<sup>31</sup> His name was Jackie Robinson.

Jackie Robinson, born in 1919, was the youngest of five children and the son of a poor sharecropper in Georgia. After his father abandoned the family, Jackie's mother, Mallie, moved her five children to Pasadena, California where she thought they may have better chances. Even though California wasn't like the Deep South, the Robinson family felt the effects of discrimination in their new home. Mallie found a job as a domestic and often didn't make enough money to feed her family. When she had finally saved enough to put a down payment on a house in a white neighborhood, efforts were made to force them out. Jackie's brother, Mack, won a silver medal at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, finishing second to Jesse Owens in the 200-meter sprint. But in California, Mack could only find work as a custodian because blacks were excluded from other jobs.<sup>32</sup> As a college student at UCLA, Jackie excelled in all sports. He won varsity letters in football, basketball, track, and baseball. Even though he led the basketball conference in scoring, he was not chosen to play on either the first, second, or third all-division teams. Robinson left UCLA during his senior year to assist his mother and family financially. When he was drafted in the Army, Jackie discovered that racism was pervasive throughout the military. He was denied admission to Officers Candidate School even though he had been to college. He was also banned from the Fort Riley baseball team and was told to go play for the "colored team" – even though there was no "colored team".<sup>33</sup> When he was transferred to Fort Hood, Texas and refused to sit in the back of a military bus, Robinson was court martialed for insubordination. He was acquitted and received an honorable discharge in 1944. By 1945, Jackie Robinson was playing baseball in the Negro Leagues with the Kansas City Monarchs. In August of the same year, a baseball scout working for Branch Rickey approached Robinson at Comiskey Park in Chicago and invited him to meet with the owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers in New York City. The two men discussed the challenges that the first black player in the major leagues would have to face and the restraint that he would have to exhibit when provoked. "Mr. Rickey, do you want a ballplayer who's afraid to fight back?" Jackie asked at one point, to which Branch Rickey replied, "I want a player with guts enough not to fight back."<sup>34</sup> Robinson assured Rickey, "... I think I can play ball in Brooklyn. But, you're a better judge of that than I am. If you want to take this gamble, I will promise you there will be no incident."<sup>35</sup> Jackie Robinson was true to his word. Despite being hit by pitches, spiked on the bases, and harassed with racist comments by players in the dugout, he refused to strike back. Threats and hate mail did not lead to retaliation. Even an unsuccessful petition circulated among players trying to force the exclusion of Robinson from major league baseball could not make him turn upon his enemies. Jackie's revenge was becoming one of the best baseball players the league had ever seen. During his ten years as a Brooklyn Dodger, he was elected to play in six all-star games and won the 1947 Rookie of the Year Award, the 1949 National League batting title, and the 1949 Most Valuable Player Award. He retired in 1956 with a batting average of .311 and, in 1962, was elected to the Baseball Hall Of Fame.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps Jackie Robinson's most important contribution to major league baseball was that he paved the way for other talented black players to compete with white players at the professional level. On August 26, 1947, Don Bankhead became the first black pitcher to play in the major leagues. On April 20, 1948, Roy Campanella, became baseball's first black catcher. On July 9, 1948, Satchel Paige became the first black pitcher in the American League. Don Newcomb became the first black pitcher to win the award in 1949. By the end of the 1940s, five percent of players in MLB were non-white players. By the mid-1950s, more than ten percent of the national league players were non-white players. As a boy, past ACLU director Ira Glasser watched these proud black ball players and learned lessons that "prepared us for the struggles that would come in the larger society a decade and more later. By the time of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the demonstration at which Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech, those nine-year olds were twenty-five. Standing there in that huge crowd, we felt we had bore witness to this before. In fact, the March on Washington took place on August 28, 1963, eighteen years to the day of that first meeting between Rickey and Robinson."<sup>37</sup>

### School Desegregation in New Orleans

In Topeka, Kansas, eight year old Linda Brown walked a mile every day to get to school, her walk including having to cross a railroad shipyard, even though there was an all-white school in her neighborhood. In Washington D.C., a group of African-American children were denied admittance to the soon-to-be-opened John Phillip Sousa Junior High School even though space was available. In Claymont, Delaware, students were bused to the city of Wilmington every day to attend Howard High School instead of being able to go to Claymont High School, although the all-white school had fewer students, more teachers with advanced degrees, and offered courses in economics, public speaking, Spanish, and trigonometry. In Summerton, South Carolina, where there was no bus transportation for black children, Levi Pearson's three children had to walk nine miles each way to attend their school. In Prince Edward County, Virginia, a group of students, led by sixteen year old Barbara Johns had to go on strike to bring attention to their old, crowded high school where teachers were paid substantially less than teachers at the all-white high school and where they had no gymnasium, cafeteria or auditorium.<sup>38</sup> Joined together, the litigation stemming from these experiences (Brown v. Board of Education in Topeka, Bolling v. Sharp in Washington D.C., Gebhart et al. v. Benton in Delaware, Briggs v. Elliot et al in South Carolina, and Davis et al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County in Virginia) became the cases that collectively are known as Brown v. Board of Education. In the spring of 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schools violated the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, reversing the earlier Plessey ruling permitting "separate but equal" public facilities.<sup>39</sup>

Within a few days of the Supreme Court's ruling, many white political leaders from segregated states attacked the decision. In Louisiana, the state legislature, led by Governor Jimmy Davis, wrote an amendment to the state constitution that required school segregation "to promote and protect public health, morals, better education and the peace and good order in the State, and not because of race."<sup>40</sup> In May of 1955, the Supreme Court directed school boards to act "with all deliberate speed" to desegregate their schools and required them to submit their desegregation plans to federal district judges for review. Thurgood Marshall and Robert Carter, NAACP attorneys, encouraged southern black parents to demand that local school boards adhere to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. After the Orleans Parish School Board refused to act, attorney A.P. Tureaud re-opened a 1952 lawsuit in which a group of black parents had demanded racial desegregation of the New Orleans public schools. Tureaud also asked that the state legislative act reinforcing school segregation in Louisiana be declared unconstitutional. In February of 1956, a three-judge district court, including Judge J. Skelly Wright, held that the Louisiana constitutional amendment requiring school segregation violated the U.S. Constitution. Judge Wright also stated that New Orleans schools were unconstitutionally segregated and ordered the Orleans Parish School Board to desegregate their schools. Over the next year, the state legislature continued its attempt to circumvent the court-ordered desegregation ruling. It authorized more laws, including: an amendment allowing the state to determine the racial composition of schools in large cities, an amendment barring lawsuits against school boards, and a law giving the governor the authority to close racially mixed schools. The Louisiana legislature also offered private school tuition help to those who were forced to attend a desegregated school.<sup>41</sup> More than three years after his original decision, Judge Wright ordered the Orleans Parish School Board to complete a desegregation plan to go into effect in September of 1960.

The final plan submitted by the Orleans Parish School Board and approved by Judge Skelly Wright would go into effect on November 14, 1960. It required that black students submit an application to attend an all-white school and undergo psychological and aptitude testing as well as a character assessment before being considered.<sup>42</sup> On October 27, James Redmond, the New Orleans School Superintendent, announced that of the 137 applicants, 5 black children had been chosen to attend first grade at two schools – William J. Frantz and McDonough Elementary Schools.

On the morning of November 14 1960, four six-year-old girls, escorted and protected by police and U.S. Marshalls and surrounded by angry crowds of mostly women and children, walked into their new schools. Ruby Bridges, Tessie Prevost, Gail Etienne, and Leona Tate saw angry people waving Confederate flags and signs and heard chants such as, "Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate" and "Go home, nigger!"<sup>43</sup> Before the day was over, all of the white children from McDonough School had been withdrawn and most had left Frantz. Arch-segregationist and local politician Leander Perez donated a building and money to start a private school for children who had left the two

desegregated schools. In front of a crowd of 5,000, he shouted, "Don't wait for your daughter to be raped by these Congolese. Don't wait until the burrheads are forced into your schools. Do something about it now."<sup>44</sup> The few white families who decided to stay in the schools lost jobs, leases, faced harassment, and were even threatened with death. Daisy Gabrielle, the mother of six-year-old Yolanda was told that her daughter would catch a disease from going to school with black children. She was called a communist and many racial epithets. Lloyd Forman, local minister and father of five year old Pam, was harassed at the parsonage by protesters holding Bibles while his church was pelted with light bulbs filled with creosote. After enduring many bomb threats, he and his family began staying with other ministers, moving from house to house.<sup>45</sup> The families of the black children also felt the effects of the angry segregationists. The owners of a local grocery store told Lucille Bridges, the mother of Ruby Bridges, that she was not welcome to shop in their store because her family was part of school desegregation. Ruby's father was fired from his job at a garage because his daughter went to a white school.<sup>46</sup>

While the first grade girls went to school every day under the scornful stare of the protesters, state legislators continued to fight the federal mandate to desegregate the schools in New Orleans. They approved a resolution commending the parents who had taken their children out of McDonough and Frantz schools and encouraged them to continue the boycott. They also attempted to remove Judge Wright from participation in school desegregation in New Orleans.<sup>47</sup> On March 20, 1961, the Supreme Court declared the efforts of the state of Louisiana to keep its schools segregated to be unconstitutional, "ensuring that the New Orleans schools would remain open and at least partially desegregate."<sup>48</sup>

For the rest of the school year, the first grade girls continued to attend the empty schools. Even though the schools had been desegregated, the girls were kept apart inside the building. Gabrielle remembers that each girl was taught in a separate classroom. "That's the irony of this: We were still kept segregated"<sup>49</sup> After Christmas break, a few more white children came back into the school and there were fewer protesters outside. Occasionally, Ruby got to play with the other children. Then the school year was over. Ruby says, "The next thing I knew, it was June. That incredible year was over. Oddly enough, it ended quietly."<sup>50</sup> The next school year, eight black children started first grade while Ruby, Gail, Leona, and Tessie moved on to second grade. Although many white children continued to attend segregated private schools, some returned to the schools they had left the previous year. The slow progress toward the desegregation of New Orleans' schools had begun.

### The Sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina

During the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, North Carolina ranked forty-fifth in per capita income, had one of the highest rates of illiteracy in the south, and provided less public

support to schoolchildren than most states in the country. Despite these troubling facts, many considered North Carolina to be a progressive state. Governor Charles B. Aycock initiated programs to improve the conditions and quality of segregated black schools. He promoted the idea of black self-advancement and surrounded himself with other leaders who understood the importance of making their state an image of moderation, racial tolerance, and an “exception to southern racism.”<sup>51</sup> Greensboro embodied these same contradictions. In some ways, the city was similar to other southern cities. Neighborhoods and work places were segregated by law; the majority of black workers had jobs in personal service; fewer than 25% of all black families made more than \$5000 a year.<sup>52</sup> Yet, Greensboro blacks had a higher median education and income than those in other cities in North Carolina. 15% of the black workers of the city were employed in professional occupations. Some black families in Greensboro were able to save enough money to buy homes. Many felt that the citizens of Greensboro had mutual respect for each other, at least more so than in other southern cities. A young black schoolteacher named Vance Chavis moved to the city because “Greensboro had a little better atmosphere and it was more permissive.”<sup>53</sup> Even in Greensboro, Chavis could not escape the tradition of Jim Crow. He refused to ride the city buses, even in an emergency.

Schools were not only a source of pride to the black residents of Greensboro, but also contributed to the city’s reputation as a progressive hub in the heart of the south. By 1950, there were two hundred black teachers working in the segregated schools of Greensboro. All of them held a bachelor’s degree and 65% had earned a masters degree. In the state of North Carolina, ten black elementary schools were accredited, six of them in Greensboro. Dudley High School, built in the 1930s, had a nationwide reputation among blacks for education excellence. North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College (A&T) was established in the city in 1892 and by the 1950s, had a class “A” rating and an enrollment of 3,000 students. Greensboro was also home to Bennett College, a private women’s school known throughout black America for its excellence. These schools attracted educated black teachers from all over the south to come to Greensboro. Many of these teachers influenced generations of students by encouraging them to debate issues, stand up for their beliefs, and feel pride and empowerment. At Dudley High School, Vance Chavis, a physics teacher, and Nell Coley, an English teacher, were both vocal members of the NAACP at a time when many were silent for fear of retribution. Chavis encouraged his students to discuss voting rights with their parents and lick envelopes to go to prospective voters. He often reminded his students that he refused to ride the city buses to protest Jim Crow laws. Coley encouraged protest and wanted her students to know that “Nothing was beyond the reach of those who dared.”<sup>54</sup> Coley also believed that the black colleges in Greensboro “had to mean more to the black community because blacks were denied entry into the mainstream.”<sup>55</sup> These colleges became places where people could gather to participate in political and intellectual discussions as well as cultural activities.<sup>56</sup> In 1954, when the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schools violated the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, the Greensboro School Board adopted a

resolution agreeing to desegregate the schools of the city. The Greensboro Jaycees and the Ministerial Alliance supported the school board's resolution. An editorial in the local newspaper agreed "Segregation has been ruled out and the responsibility now is to readjust to that reality with a minimum of friction, disruption, and set-back to the public school system."<sup>57</sup> Greensboro was once again proving its reputation as a city with a progressive attitude. Many residents were optimistic that the transition to desegregated schools would go smoothly. However, at the state level, a committee, created by Governor William Umstead, concluded that the integration of public schools could not be accomplished and should not be attempted. They proposed that local districts control student assignment to schools. When Umstead died unexpectedly, the new governor was appointed. Luther Hodges, a vocal opponent of the NAACP, continued to endorse the policies of school segregation. A new committee was formed and created what would become known as the Pearsall Plan. This plan allowed students to be excused from attending a desegregated school and recommended that the state accept applications for private school tuition reimbursement for children assigned to such schools.<sup>58</sup> Three years after the Supreme Court ruling, schools throughout North Carolina, including the city of Greensboro, remained segregated. Black residents in Greensboro quickly grew impatient. Memberships to the NAACP grew to 1200 people. Vance Chavis recalled that the Brown decision encouraged "people to come out and express how they felt more"<sup>59</sup> Black residents held rallies and canceled charge accounts when they were excluded from a cooking class sponsored by a local department store. Students at A&T, during a speech by Governor Hodges, began moving their feet across the floor and coughing when he spoke critically of the leaders of the NAACP.<sup>60</sup> A group of black men demanded the right to play golf at the local golf course. Many black leaders promoted caution but "there could be little question that blacks in Greensboro were not intimidated by either Governor Hodges or his pro-segregation platform. Even if white leaders wished to forestall change, the black community had an evolving agenda of its own."<sup>61</sup>

In the fall of 1959, four young freshmen at A&T met while living at Scott Hall. Franklin McCain grew up in Washington D.C. and came to the school in Greensboro to study chemistry and biology. Joseph McNeil, from Wilmington, North Carolina, studied engineering physics. Ezell Blair, Jr, a Greensboro native and graduate of Dudley High School, was active with the NAACP and studied sociology at A&T. David Richmond, also from Greensboro, had graduated from Dudley High School and was studying business administration and accounting.<sup>62</sup> Two of the young men had been taught by Dudley teacher Nell Coley, who instilled in them a sense of pride. They all came from homes where they were taught to stand up for civil rights. Two of the four had attended a church led by Otis Hairston, a proud NAACP member, and had participated in an NAACP youth group. Ezell Blair heard a sermon delivered by Martin Luther King, Jr. that brought tears to his eyes. These four young men became good friends during their first year in college and spent many evenings talking about the black condition and the need for change. Many people and experiences influenced their ideas and eventually

their decision to act rather than just talk. Ralph Johns, a local merchant and one of the few white members of the local NAACP, frequently talked to them about the need for students to take a more active role. Ezell Blair was moved by Gandhi's model of passive insistence. Joseph McNeil worked, and had many conversations, with Eula Hudgens, an A&T graduate who had participated in the 1947 Freedom Rides. They were all angered when McNeil, returning from a trip to New York in December, was refused food at the Greensboro Trailways bus terminal. These many influences helped solidify their ideas and, in January of 1960, led them to action.<sup>63</sup>

On Monday, February 1, 1960 at 4:30 p.m., Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, David Richmond and Ezell Blair, Jr. walked into the Greensboro Woolworth store, one of the company's largest. After buying a few items, they went over to the "whites-only" lunch counter and sat down, politely ordering coffee. The waitress said, "I'm sorry but we don't serve colored here."<sup>64</sup> Ralph Johns had called the local newspaper to alert them that the sit-in was about to take place. A photographer went to the store. Police were called but did nothing and the young men remained seated until the store closed. When they got back to campus, they talked to others about what had happened. They also contacted the student body president to organize transportation for those who may want to join them. The Student Executive Committee for Justice was organized to plan the next steps. The committee sent a letter to the president of F.W. Woolworth in New York City asking the company "take a firm stand to eliminate discrimination"<sup>65</sup> By Thursday, demonstrators from A&T were joined by students from Bennett College, Dudley High School, and the Women's College of the University of North Carolina. A group of white young men crowded the aisles of the Woolworth store, yelling at the students, using threatening language. By Saturday, February 5, close to 1,000 protesters and observers, including the A&T football team, filled downtown Greensboro. The protesters were met by heckling white youth waving confederate flags. The store was closed after receiving a bomb threat. That evening, more than 1,000 students voted to stop the demonstrations to give store executives a chance to study the problem and enter into negotiations. Students in Winston-Salem, and Durham, North Carolina held sit-ins to show solidarity with the Greensboro students. Students in Charlotte, Raleigh, Fayetteville and High Point soon followed with sit-ins of their own. The movement soon spread to Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. There was even a protest at the Woolworth store in New York City. By the end of March, the sit-in movement had spread to fifty-five cities in thirteen states. In April, students in Greensboro resumed the protests after negotiations broke down and on April 2, Woolworth officially closed their lunch counter. On Thursday, July 21, the manager of F.W. Woolworth, Clarence Harris, announced that the store would soon serve all properly dressed and well-behaved people. On Tuesday, July 26, 1960, the lunch counters at all F.W. Woolworth became desegregated.<sup>66</sup>

The lunch counter sit-ins led to other demonstrations across the country to protest segregated conditions in churches, hotels, swimming pools, beaches, libraries, parks and movie theatres. By August 1961, more than 70,000 people had participated in sit-ins

around the country.<sup>67</sup> In August of 1960, The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was founded in Raleigh, North Carolina to build on the momentum from the sit-ins. Over the next few years, the SNCC became one of the leading forces in the Civil Rights Movement. The group organized the 1961 Freedom Rides and the March on Washington in 1963, where thousands of people first heard the “I Have a Dream” speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>68</sup>

## **Classroom Lessons**

### Background

To teach third grade students about segregation, Jim Crow laws, and some of the people who brought about change, I based my unit of study on six children’s books: Ruth and the Green Book by Calvin Alexander Ramsey and illustrated by Floyd Cooper, Teammates by Peter Golenbock and illustrated by Paul Bacon, The Story of Ruby Bridges, by Robert Coles and illustrated by Georg Ford or Through My Eyes by Ruby Bridges, Sit-In by Andrea Davis Pinkney and illustrated by Brian Pinkney, Freedom on the Menu by Carole Boston Weatherford and illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue and Wings by Christopher Meyers. Each lesson includes a strategy, a group activity, and an independent activity. Lessons for each book could certainly be extended to more than one day and include many skills and activities. The activities can be adapted to meet the needs of students working at many different levels.

Three reading comprehension strategies: sequencing, characterization, and cause/effect, are included in the desegregation unit to help students understand characters, events, motivation, and effects. Being able to use these strategies to comprehend text is an essential part of any third grade reading curriculum. Sequencing events helps students understand what happens in a story. Analyzing characters helps students relate to them as real people and understand their actions and motivations. Being able to recognize and discuss the cause and the effect of actions in a story help students make sense of events and consequences.

### Essential Questions

What would it be like to live in a segregated town?

Why does it take courage to change something?

Why is it important for people to have equal rights?

Why is it important for us to remember what people did a long time ago?

How can individual actions bring about change?

The unit can be introduced by reading Ruth and the Green Book, a story about a young girl who experiences the unfairness of Jim Crow laws for the first time while traveling with her parents to Alabama in the 1950s. Give background information about

segregation in the south and Jim Crow laws before reading the story and lead a classroom discussion about characters, events, and student reactions afterward.

## Lesson 1

### *Vocabulary*

segregation, extraordinary, prejudice, opportunity, opponent, courage

### *Discussion*

Identify, define, and discuss the vocabulary words. Read the book, Teammates, to the class, stopping throughout the story to check for understanding and to answer questions that students may have. After reading the story, lead a classroom discussion about events, the characters - their actions, motivations, and emotions, and the effects of the characters' actions.

### *Group Activity*

Provide sentence strips with one important event from the story printed on each. In groups of two or three, students will sequence these events. Allow discussion during the activity and move from group to group, checking for understanding. Students can choose some of the sentences to illustrate. Encourage them to include details in their pictures that would show how the characters might be feeling.

### *Independent Activity*

Students will be able to accurately order the events of the story. Individually, they will sequence the sentence strips used in the group activity and glue them in order on a separate piece of paper.

## Lesson 2

### *Vocabulary*

integration, rights, protest, barricade, mob

### *Discussion*

Identify, define, and discuss the vocabulary words. There are two books that may be used for this lesson. The Story of Ruby Bridges is an easy to understand version of the

story that can be read in one session. Through My Eyes, written by Ruby herself with accompanying photographs, includes more details about the events and requires more reading time. If time permits, Through My Eyes allows for a more thorough investigation of the characters and events and gives students a more complete understanding of the topic. Read the book to the class, stopping throughout the story to check for understanding and to answer questions that students may have. After reading the story, lead a classroom discussion about events, the characters - their actions, motivations, and emotions, and the effects of the characters' actions. Concentrate on the character questions – who they are, what they did, why they did it, and why it is important.

### *Group Activity*

In groups of four, students will spend 5-10 minutes brainstorming about who Ruby Bridges was, what she did, why she did it, and why it is important. They can also discuss words and phrases they would use to describe her and her experiences in the story. Provide each group with a poster-size piece of paper and colorful markers. Each group will decorate their poster and include words and phrases that best tell about Ruby. Completed posters will be displayed around the classroom so members of each group can explain how their work describes the character of Ruby Bridges.

### *Independent Activity*

Students will be able to complete a character map about Ruby Bridges by writing at least three sentences for each area. They will demonstrate knowledge of the following ideas: who Ruby Bridges is, what she did, why she did what she did, how she might have felt and why are her actions important to people today.

## Lesson 3

### *Vocabulary*

patient, ignore, refuse, violence, non-violence

### *Discussion*

Identify, define, and discuss the vocabulary words. Students may need some background information about Woolworths lunch counter. Read the book, Sit-In, to the class, stopping throughout the story to check for understanding and to answer questions that students may have. After reading the story, lead a classroom discussion about events, the characters - their actions, motivations, and emotions. Concentrate on the causes of the actions at the lunch counter and the effects of the sit-in. Another book, Freedom on the Menu by Carole Boston Weatherford tells the same story through the eyes of a young girl who observes the events and whose family participates in the sit-ins. Reading this book

in conjunction with the first story would give students a more complete understanding of the topic.

### *Group Activity*

With a partner, students will spend 5-10 minutes brainstorming ideas about the cause of the sit-in and the effect of the sit-in. After discussion, they will work together to complete a cause/effect graphic organizer. Included in the organizer could be causes and effects of David, Joseph, Franklin, and Ezell sitting at the Woolworths lunch counter and refusing to leave. Upon completion, partners will team up with another pair of students to discuss what they have written and justify their choices.

### *Independent Activity*

Students will be able to write two short paragraphs of at least 4 sentences each explaining the cause and effect of the Greensboro sit-in. They will demonstrate knowledge of at least two causes and two effects.

End of Unit

### *Vocabulary*

tolerance, intolerance

The unit can be ended by reading Wings by Christopher Myers. This is a modern day story about a boy with wings who is teased and ostracized because of his differences. Use this book as a way for students to use what they have learned to analyze and discuss the characters and events of the story.

## **Appendix A**

### Reading Content Standards

3.RI.8 – Describe the logical connection between particular sentences and paragraphs in a text (e.g., comparison, cause/effect, first/second/third in a sequence)

3.RL.3 – Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of event

3.SL.1 – Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly

3.RI.4 – Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 3 topic or subject area

3.RI.7 – Use information gained from illustrations and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur)

3.RI.3 – Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect

3.RI.1 – Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers

3.RI.2 – Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea

3.RI.10 – By the end of the year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical text, at the high end of the grades 2-3 complexity band independently and proficiently

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<sup>1</sup> (Shuster 2012)

<sup>2</sup> (Shuster 2012)

<sup>3</sup> (School Profile 2013)

<sup>4</sup> (Benedict 1996)

<sup>5</sup> (Constitution of the United States Amendments 11-27 n.d.)

<sup>6</sup> (Benedict 1996)

<sup>7</sup> (Benedict 1996)

<sup>8</sup> (Constitution of the United States Amendments 11-27 n.d.)

<sup>9</sup> (Civil Rights Act (1875)

<sup>10</sup> (Civil Rights Act of 1875 Declared Unconstitutional 2002)

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<sup>11</sup> (Timeline of Events Leadin to the Brown v. Board of Education Decision n.d.)

<sup>12</sup> (Jim Crow Laws n.d.)

<sup>13</sup> (What Was Jim Crow? n.d.)

<sup>14</sup> (Essay on The Need for Change n.d.)

<sup>15</sup> (What Was Jim Crow? n.d.)

<sup>16</sup> (Essay on The Need for Change n.d.)

<sup>17</sup> (The Players n.d.)

<sup>18</sup> (Dierenfield, The Civil Rights Movement 2008, pg. 54-56)

<sup>19</sup> (Blacks in Baseball n.d.)

<sup>20</sup> (Tygiel 1983, pg 11)

<sup>21</sup> (Tygiel 1983, pg. 11)

<sup>22</sup> (Glasser 2013)

<sup>23</sup> (Negro League History 101 n.d.)

<sup>24</sup> (Negro League History 101 n.d.)

<sup>25</sup> (Tygiel 1983, pg. 26)

<sup>26</sup> (Tygiel 1983, pg. 27)

<sup>27</sup> (Tygiel 1983, pg. 27)

<sup>28</sup> (Tygiel 1983, pg. 53)

<sup>29</sup> (goldman n.d.)

<sup>30</sup> (goldman n.d.)

<sup>31</sup> (Glasser 2013)

<sup>32</sup> (Glasser 2013)

<sup>33</sup> (Glasser 2013)

<sup>34</sup> (Glasser 2013)

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- <sup>35</sup> (Tygiel 1983, pg.67)
- <sup>36</sup> (Baseball Encyclopedia of MLB Players n.d.)
- <sup>37</sup> (Glasser 2013)
- <sup>38</sup> (Brown v. Board of Education n.d.)
- <sup>39</sup> (Jim Crow Laws n.d.)
- <sup>40</sup> (History of the Federal Judiciary n.d., pg. 3)
- <sup>41</sup> (History of the Federal Judiciary n.d., pg.3)
- <sup>42</sup> (History of the Federal Judiciary n.d., pg 5)
- <sup>43</sup> (Bridges 1999, pg 22)
- <sup>44</sup> (Reckdahl 2010)
- <sup>45</sup> (Reckdahl 2010)
- <sup>46</sup> (Bridges 1999)
- <sup>47</sup> (History of the Federal Judiciary n.d.)
- <sup>48</sup> (History of the Federal Judiciary n.d.)
- <sup>49</sup> (Reckdahl 2010)
- <sup>50</sup> (Bridges 1999, pg. 50)
- <sup>51</sup> (Chafe 1980, pg. 4)
- <sup>52</sup> (Chafe 1980, pg. 16)
- <sup>53</sup> (Chafe 1980, pg. 18)
- <sup>54</sup> (Chafe 1980, pg. 21)
- <sup>55</sup> (Chafe 1980, pg. 20)
- <sup>56</sup> (Chafe 1980, pg. 20)
- <sup>57</sup> (Chafe 1980, pg. 42)
- <sup>58</sup> (dunn n.d.)

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<sup>59</sup> (Chafe 1980, pg. 60)

<sup>60</sup> (Chafe 1980, pg. 61)

<sup>61</sup> (Chafe 1980, pg. 64)

<sup>62</sup> (Greensboro Chronology n.d.)

<sup>63</sup> (Chafe 1980, pg.82)

<sup>64</sup> (Price 1010)

<sup>65</sup> (Greensboro Chronology n.d.)

<sup>66</sup> (Chafe 1980, pg. 98)

<sup>67</sup> (Greensboro Chronology n.d.)

<sup>68</sup> (Greensboro sit-In and the sit-In Movement n.d.)

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**Curriculum Unit Title**

Desegregation in America – How Everyday People Made a Difference

**Author**

Ellen Mulshnock

**KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.**

By the end of the unit, students will understand: The meaning of the words tolerance, intolerance, segregation, integration, the effect of segregation practices on children and their families, the roles that everyday people played to change those practices, the similarities and differences between their lives and the lives of the people who lived under the rules of segregation, and their responsibility to show tolerance toward others.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT**

What would it be like to live in a segregated town? Why does it take courage to change something? Why is it important for people to have equal rights? Why is it important for us to remember what people did a long time ago? How can individual actions bring about change?

**CONCEPT A**

Jackie Robinson and the integration of baseball

**CONCEPT B**

Ruby Bridges and the integration of schools in New Orleans

**CONCEPT C**

The Greensboro Four and the sit-ins at Woolworths

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A**

What would it be like to live in a segregated town? Why does it take courage to change something? Why is it important for people to have equal rights? Why is it important for us to remember what people did a long time ago? How can individual actions bring about change?

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B**

What would it be like to live in a segregated town? Why does it take courage to change something? Why is it important for people to have equal rights? Why is it important for us to remember what people did a long time ago? How can individual actions bring about change?

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C**

Why does it take courage to change something? Why is it important for people to have equal rights? Why is it important for us to remember what people did a long time ago? How can individual actions bring about change?

**VOCABULARY A**

segregation, extraordinary, prejudice, opportunity, opponent, courage

**VOCABULARY A**

patient, ignore, refuse, violence, non-violence

**VOCABULARY A**

Integration, rights, protest, barricade, mob

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES**

The following children’s books are needed to implement this unit: [Ruth and the Green Book](#) by Calvin Alexander Ramsey, [The Story of Ruby Bridges](#) by Robert Coles, [Through My Eyes](#) by Ruby Bridges, [Sit-in – How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down](#) by Andrea Davis Pinkney, [Freedom on the Menu – The Greensboro Sit-Ins](#) by Carole Boston Weatherford, [Teammates – How Two Men Changed the Face of Baseball](#) by Peter Golenbock and [Wings](#) by Christopher Myers