



Brown Undone?

*This lesson was adapted from Tacoma Arts Live's original curricula for the theatrical production, **Thurgood** in Winter 2018.*

Grades	9 – 12
Objective	Analyze trends in school integration in recent decades; Identify factors that lead to re-segregation or integration
Materials	Article from Frontline: <i>Separate and Unequal: The Return of School Segregation in Eight Charts</i>

Background

The bravery of 6 year-old Ruby Bridges became a symbol of desegregation. While the Supreme Court called for school integration in 1954, declaring that “separate is inherently unequal,” the actual implementation of integrated schools is checkered at best. Some southern states vehemently opposed integration, requiring presidents to use federal forces to carry out integration. Alabama even opted to defund its public education system rather than support integration. Meanwhile, in later decades northern cities like Boston became ground zero for contentious debates over mandatory bussing as a way to combat segregation. A steady flow of court cases and rulings have eroded integration gains in the past 30 years and there is an increasing trend for well-to-do areas to secede from larger racially/economically mixed districts, resulting in distinct, homogenous school districts.

In this activity, students review trends of the past few decades and identify factors that contribute to the shaping of school populations.

Lesson Procedure

Students read the Frontline article from the *Separate and Unequal* series: *The Return of School Segregation in Eight Charts* (<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/the-return-of-school-segregation-in-eight-charts/>).

Format: Each student reads the entire article and then self-directs into one of eight small groups formed by the eight headings in the article OR divide the students into groups ahead of time.

Headings/Charts:

- 1.) Gains achieved by black students in the south are gone
- 2.) Court oversight increasingly faded during the 2000s
- 3.) Segregation tends to rise without court oversight
- 4.) Integration is struggling to keep up with enrollment trends
- 5.) Whites have the least exposure to students of other races
- 6.) Segregation is as much about poverty as it is about race
- 7.) Integration boosts the odds of high school graduation

8.) Integrated schools can lead to a healthier financial future

Each group is responsible for discussing their portion of the article and then preparing to brief the rest of the class.

(Note that groups 1 – 6 will examine factors contributing to the re-segregation of American schools since the 1960s and groups 7-8 will discuss the research-indicated benefits of integration.)

Questions for concluding whole group discussion:

- 1.) When did integration reach its height?
- 2.) What are some of the reasons for the return toward segregation since then?
- 3.) What do the events of the past 60 years tell us about how receptive or unreceptive U.S. society has been to the concept of school integration?
- 4.) What recommendations would you provide to educational policymakers on how to combat segregation?
- 5.) Explain some of the advantages of integration, as discussed in the article.
- 6.) Consider your own school: Where does it fall on the spectrum between segregation and integration? If you could make changes to the school with regard to this issue, what changes would you suggest and why?

Extension

Using school data (such as that available through [OSPI Report Card](#)) or even by surveying old school yearbooks, have students research the demographics of their own school. Are there clear examples of demographic change in certain time periods? What might be the reasons for those changes? New policies, changing neighborhoods, something else? What is gained and lost as the school experiences these changes?