

GRADES 3-5 LESSON PLAN

SEPARATE IS NEVER EQUAL

Title: *Separate is Never Equal*

Author: Duncan Tonatiuh

Grade Level: 3-5

Standards*:

- **Common Core:** *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.1, 3.2, & 3.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1, 4.2, & 4.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1, 5.2, & 5.3*
- **Virginia Standards of Learning:** 3.6; 4.6; 5.6

Overarching Theme(s): Segregation, Fairness, Point of View, Empathy, Inferencing

Timeframe: (60-90 minutes)

Separate is Never Equal

Summary: This is the account of the *Mendez v. Westminster School District (1945)* case which argued for desegregation of schools and paved the way for the landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*. In California, Sylvia Mendez and her siblings were forced to go to a school designated for Mexican children rather than their district school. The school designated for Mexican students was sorely under-resourced when compared to the school for White students, and attendees received a subpar education that gave little attention to academics. Her parents decided to sue the district, and after two court cases, the courts decided that separate education for Mexican children within Orange County was unfair. Sylvia, alongside other Mexican children unfairly relegated to the “Mexican” school, were able to attend the school previously reserved for only White children.

Lesson Goals:

1. Engage students in the ramifications (emotional, physical and academic) of unequal treatment
2. Engage students in understanding how equity and equality are not always the same and making something fair does not always mean making it equal
3. Probe students to think about how a person’s actions can indirectly affect other actors in a dilemma

Key Terms:

- ***Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)*:** the Supreme Court case which ruled that the racial segregation of children in public schools was unlawful/unconstitutional, even if the separate schools were considered equal in quality. It forced the desegregation of schools across the United States
- **Desegregation:** the process of ending the separation of people because of their race; it took years for some of the states to agree (for example, some states and cities refused to let White children go to school with Black students); laws were later passed to integrate schools, restaurants and businesses and to allow interracial marriage

- **Equal Opportunity:** a policy of treating others without discrimination, especially on the bases of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, religion, etc.
- **Jim Crow Laws:** laws and rules that discriminated against or enforced the segregation of Black people in the United States (for example, Black people had to use separate drinking fountains, restrooms, medical facilities, theaters, restaurants, railroad cars, buses, and schools with old or used textbooks and equipment, etc.); the laws purposely created disadvantages for Black people; Jim Crow was not an actual person but was the name of a song and dance done by a white entertainer who wore Blackface
- **Racial Segregation:** separating people because of their race; segregation was legal because of laws created by people who thought White people in America were the superior race; this led to “separate but equal” policies which implied people of different races had separate but equally good options for things like schools, restaurants and hospitals; in reality, People of Color had poorer options compared to White people; legal from 1896 (*Plessy v. Ferguson*) to 1954 (*Brown v. Board*)
- **Racism:** the unfair treatment of people based on the opinion that one race is better than another race or races; a system of advantage based on race; racial prejudice plus social power; individual racism: actions and/or language toward a person that intentionally expresses prejudice, hate, or bias based on race; institutional racism: discriminatory treatment, unfair policies, and inequitable opportunities and impacts, based on race, that are produced and perpetuated by institutions (schools, workplace, mass media, etc.); structural or systemic racism: normalization and legitimization of historical, cultural, institutional, and interpersonal dynamics that routinely advantage White people, while producing cumulative and long-lasting disadvantages for People of Color
- **School Integration:** the act of bringing students of different races together by law; some states and cities refused to let White children go to school with Black students even after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling
- ***Mendez vs. Westminster (1947)*:** a court case in California that helped to pave the way for *Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)*; the ruling stated that, “public education must be open to all children by unified school association regardless of lineage,” and that the school districts must cease their “discriminatory practices against the pupils of Mexican descent in the public schools”

Procedure:

*Important! Before the start of the lesson, students **must** engage in transactive discussion practice for the discussion to be meaningful. This does not have to take place before every lesson but students need to be familiar with this type of discussion for the lesson to be effective.*

Before Read Aloud:

Teacher should ask students what they know about *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the landmark Supreme Court decision that desegregated schools across America. Explain that before this case, there were others people fighting for the same issues, and today the discussion will focus on one particular case that involved Mexican-American students in California.

The teacher should read the story aloud to the whole group. During the read aloud process, teacher should stop and ask teacher-generated comprehension questions to assess/support student understanding, address misconceptions, and answer questions.

Following Read Aloud:*

Students, in groups of 3-5 people, should work together to respond to discussion questions.

- Teachers should remind students that they are working as a team to figure out the best answer/position for each question.
- Teacher should circulate among groups during the discussion process, probing students to practice communicative discussion practices, as outlined in transactive discussion guidelines. Teacher should not provide right or wrong statements to students regarding answer but rather probing questions.
- After small group discussions, students share out the conclusions of their small group with the whole class. Answers should reflect what the whole group determined, rather than individual responses of each group member.
- Immediately following small group and whole class discussions, teacher should have students *independently* respond to writing prompts or assign for homework.

*Note: For questions occurring after specific page numbers, teacher can stop and have students discuss in small groups. If there are multiple copies of the book, students can also address the questions after reading.

Discussion Questions

(pg. 1-9):

1. How do you think Sylvia and her brother are feeling when the secretary tells her aunt that they cannot attend the White school?
 - a. Why do you think that she cannot attend the school but her cousins can?
 - i. *If students say it is because they have different skin complexions, ask the following—*
 1. Do you think that is fair?
 - b. What do you think that Sylvia's aunt should do?
 - i. Why?
 - ii. *(Depending on answer)* Do you think that it is fair?

Page | 4

(pg. 10-13)

2. Do you think Sylvia's aunt made the right decision?
 - a. Why or why not?
3. When Sylvia's father confronts superintendent Mr. Harris about this policy, Mr. Harris replies that this is just the way it is done.
 - a. Is it okay for something to continue if it's "just the way it was done?"
 - b. If you think it is unfair for Sylvia not to go to the school, do you think it is Mr. Harris's responsibility to do something to fix it?
 - i. Why or why not?
 - ii. *(Depending on answer)* Whose responsibility is it?
4. Why do you think that some White people wanted their children to attend different schools from Mexican children?

(pg. 14-15):

5. How do you think it makes Sylvia and her family members feel because they have to attend this school simply because they are Mexican?

(pg. 16-17):

6. Why do you think Sylvia's family and friends refused to help in the fight to send their children to all-White schools?
 - a. Do you think they made the right or wrong decision? Why or why not?
 - b. How do you think Sylvia's friends affected the effort to create equal schools?

(pg. 16-23):

7. What do you think the other families were thinking when they agreed to help?
 - a. Is it their responsibility to help?
 - i. Why or why not?
8. Now that her father is gone working to get them in school, how do you think Sylvia feels having to work the farm?

(pg. 25-29):

9. Why do you think that Mr. Kent told the judge that the schools were to improve students' English if that was not the truth?
 - a. Why did he tell a lie about providing tests and about the students' cleanliness?
 - b. Do you think he actually believed this?

(pg. 30-35):

10. We know the judge made the right decision. However, what other options could he have chosen?
 - a. Why would those not be fair?
11. We also see that people from all over, who might not actually have kids attending the school, begin to help.
 - a. Do you think that is their responsibility?
 - b. What would you do?

Writing Prompts

1. Part of the reason that Sylvia’s dad was able to change the law was because of the help he got from other people. Do you think it is other people’s responsibility to help change an unfair law even if it doesn’t affect them? Why or why not? *Defend your answer using evidence from the book and/or class discussions.*

2. Some White people did not want their children attending school with Mexican children. What would you say to convince them that this is a bad decision, taking into consideration the concerns they may have about sending their children to school with Mexican children? *Defend your answer using evidence from the book and/or class discussions.*

Writing Prompts

- 1. Part of the reason that Sylvia’s dad was able to change the law was because of the help he got from other people. Do you think it is other people’s responsibility to help change an unfair law even if it doesn’t affect them? Why or why not? *Defend your answer using evidence from the book and/or class discussions.*

I do/don’t (circle one) think it is other people’s responsibility to help change an unfair law even if it doesn’t affect them because _____

The reason I believe this is because _____

- 2. Some White people did not want their children attending school with Mexican children. What would you say to convince them that this is a bad decision, taking into consideration the concerns they may have about sending their children to school with Mexican children? *Defend your answer using evidence from the book and/or class discussions.*

To convince them that this is a bad decision, I would say _____

I would say this because _____

Standards*

Common Core Standards**[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1](#)**

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

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2](#)

Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3](#)

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

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1](#)

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2](#)

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3](#)

Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#)

Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2](#)

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#)

Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL)

Reading: Demonstrate comprehension of fictional texts and use word analysis strategies

- **3.6** The student will continue to read and demonstrate comprehension of nonfiction texts. a) Identify the author's purpose. b) Use prior and background knowledge as context for new learning. c) Preview and use text features. d) Ask and answer questions about what is read. e) Draw conclusions based on text. f) Summarize major points found in nonfiction texts. g) Identify the main idea. h) Identify supporting details. i) Compare and contrast the characteristics of biographies and autobiographies. j) Use reading strategies to monitor comprehension throughout the reading process. k) Identify new information gained from reading. l) Read with fluency and accuracy.
- **4.6** The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of nonfiction texts. a) Use text structures, such as type, headings, and graphics, to predict and categorize information in both print and digital texts. b) Formulate questions that might be answered in the selection. c) Explain the author's purpose. d) Identify the main idea. e) Summarize supporting details. f) Draw conclusions and make simple inferences using textual information as support. g) Distinguish between cause and effect. h) Distinguish between fact and opinion. i) Use prior

knowledge and build additional background knowledge as context for new learning. j) Identify new information gained from reading. k) Use reading strategies throughout the reading process to monitor comprehension. l) Read with fluency and accuracy.

- **5.6** The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of nonfiction texts. a) Use text organizers, such as type, headings, and graphics, to predict and categorize information in both print and digital texts. b) Use prior knowledge and build additional background knowledge as context for new learning. c) Skim materials to develop a general overview of content and to locate specific information. d) Identify the main idea of nonfiction texts. e) Summarize supporting details in nonfiction texts. f) Identify structural patterns found in nonfiction. g) Locate information to support opinions, predictions, and conclusions. h) Identify cause and effect relationships following transition words signaling the pattern. i) Differentiate between fact and opinion. j) Identify, compare, and contrast relationships. k) Identify new information gained from reading. l) Use reading strategies throughout the reading process to monitor comprehension. m) Read with fluency and accuracy.