

Civics Lessons for Student Engagement

Teacher Resource Book



THE
**CHOICES
PROGRAM**
BROWN UNIVERSITY

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Contributors

The curriculum developers at the Choices Program write, edit, and produce Choices curricula. We would also like to thank the following people for their essential contributions to creating these lessons:

LEAH ELLIOTT
Contributing Author

MAYA LINDBERG
Contributing Author

JESSICA FIELDS
Contributing Author

SARAH MASSEY
Contributing Author

EMMETT STARR FITZGERALD
Contributing Author

ADA OKUN
Contributing Author

DANIELLE JOHNSTONE
Contributing Author

LINDSAY TURCHAN
Contributing Author

Cover images: National Archives (NAID: 1667751); Douglas Miles; Gabriel Civita Ramirez (CC BY-SA 2.0); and ©1976, George Ballis/ Take Stock.

The Choices Program

SUSANNAH BECHTEL
Assistant Director, Curriculum
Development

JO FISHER
Marketing and Communications Specialist

REBECCA NEDOSTUP
Faculty Director

ANDY BLACKADAR
Curriculum Development Director

KEVIN HOSKINS
Curriculum Developer

CHRISTINE SEGUIN
Administrative Assistant

EMILIA FIGLIOMENI
Video Producer

KATHLEEN MAGIERA
Administrative Manager

MIMI STEPHENS
Professional Development Director

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Note to Teachers

This collection of eleven civics lessons adapted from the Choices Program’s curriculum series provides teachers with standalone activities that have a special focus on civic education. The lessons help students explore the founding documents, important Supreme Court cases, and key congressional debates. The lessons not only help students understand the functions and basis of government, but also encourage them to consider and develop their own roles as citizen participants in the democratic process.

These lessons do not have the accompanying readings contained in standard Choices curriculum units. Teachers may need to provide some basic context to students before beginning the lessons. Each lesson plan includes some suggestions about basic context.

Teachers who want to use the full curriculum unit with readings, additional lessons, study guides and graphic organizers can find each of the lessons in this collection listed below along with their original curriculum unit. All are available from the Choices Program.

The American Revolution: Experiences of Rebellion

- “The Declaration of Independence”

We the People: A New Nation

- “Slavery and the Constitution”
- “Ideals in the Founding Documents: Demands for Rights”

Westward Expansion: A New History

- “*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 1831”

The Civil War and the Meaning of Liberty

- “The Black National Conventions, Abolition, and the Constitution”
- “Congress Debates the Thirteenth Amendment”

Imperial America: U.S. Global Expansion, 1890-1915

- “The Insular Cases: Deciding the Constitutional Status of the Colonies”

Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi

- “Separate, but Equal? Measuring *Plessy v. Ferguson* in Mississippi”
- “Oral Histories: Students in the Civil Rights Movement”

Climate Change and Questions of Justice

- “Taking Action on Climate Change”

Responding to Terrorism: Challenges for Democracy

- “The Constitution and the War on Terror”

The lessons are provided as a guide and vary in length and difficulty. While some can often be completed within a single class period, many teachers choose to devote more than one class period to lessons. The Choices Program encourages teachers to adapt them to the needs of their students.

Note: These periods in history are marked by oppression and violence and have had lasting repercussions for many groups. Please be advised that this text includes firsthand accounts of violence, descriptions of warfare, and discussions of racial and colonial oppression. It is important to be sensitive to the students in your class and the ways in which this history might be a difficult topic.

Included Resources

• Videos and Supplemental Materials:

Choices produces short videos featuring leading experts—professors, policymakers, journalists, activists, and artists—answering questions that for use with the lessons. Videos and slideshows of color images used in the lessons are available at <www.choices.edu/civics>.

Separate, but Equal? Measuring *Plessy v. Ferguson* in Mississippi

Objectives:

Students will: Analyze, calculate, and interpret data.

Consider the implications and outcome of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in Mississippi.

Work collaboratively with classmates.

Handouts:

“Analyzing Data: Comparing Education Resources for Black and White Students in Mississippi” (TRB 65-66) for each group

Note:

Students may find a calculator and colored pencils for graphing to be helpful.

In the Classroom:

1. Focus Question—Put the following question on the board: “What is equality?” Have the class brainstorm; record their ideas. Review with the class the Supreme Court’s decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which made racial segregation legal throughout the country. What was the meaning of its central premise: “separate, but equal”?

2. Working in Groups—Divide the class into groups of three to four students and distribute the handout to each group. Groups should work through and discuss the questions pertaining to each set of data. Have one member of each group record their group’s responses on the worksheet.

For each chart, students are asked to perform a simple calculation and then interpret the result. The calculations are basic, but some students might need coaching. Emphasize to students that the graph they are making need not be overly precise. Rather it should roughly indicate trends. Emphasize the importance of labeling the graph clearly.

3. Sharing Conclusions and Discussion—Ask groups to share their findings and compare answers with the other groups. Were educational opportunities in Mississippi equal for Black and white students? Was Mississippi meeting the standard of *Plessy v. Ferguson*—“separate, but equal”? Do students feel like they have enough data and information to answer the questions?

Why would Mississippi spend less on education for Black students than white students? Ask students to consider where they might get data and information to answer this question.

What are the short and long-term impacts of underfunding education? Ask students to list any possible effects that come to mind. In addition to funding, are there other factors that students think influenced African Americans’ access to quality education? For example, if a child of sharecroppers had to help his or her parents in the fields, how would this influence his or her ability to attend school?

Related Content:

For more on this topic, see the Choices curriculum unit *Freedom Now: The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi*.

Analyzing Data: Comparing Education Resources for Black and White Students in Mississippi

Instructions: With your group, review each chart and answer the questions that follow. Be prepared to share your findings with the rest of the class.

Chart 1

Chart 1 shows the investment in school property per student in Mississippi.

School Year	White	Black	Difference
1913-1914	\$8.00	\$1.00	
1921-1922	\$18.00	\$4.00	
1935-1936	\$147.00	\$11.00	
1949-1950	\$175.00	\$11.00	

- Calculate the difference between investment in school property per Black student and per white student for each school year. (Hint: subtract Black student amount from white student amount.) Write your answers in the chart above.
 - Which school year had the greatest difference in funding for school property? What is the difference?

Chart 2

Chart 2 shows Mississippi school expenditures for each student by race.

School Year	White	Black	Black Funding as a Percentage of White Funding
1913-1914	\$8.20	\$1.53	
1929-1930	\$31.33	\$5.94	
1940-1941	\$38.96	\$4.97	
1949-1950	\$122.93	\$32.55	

- Calculate the percentage of expenditures a Black student received compared to a white student for each school year. (Hint: divide Black per student expenditure by white per student expenditure and multiply by 100.) Write your answers in the chart above.
 - In which years did the percentage of funding for Black students come the closest to funding for white students?

Chart 3

Chart 3 shows Mississippi school teacher salaries by race. Salaries earned by Black teachers were often less than they could earn as cooks or handymen.

Year	White	Black
1885-1886	\$125	\$110
1890-1891	\$130	\$90
1912-1913	\$323	\$173
1939-1940	\$750	\$237
1945-1946	\$1,211	\$426

- Create line graphs of the salaries for white teachers and for Black teachers. Focus on general trends, not precisely graphing the numbers. Be sure to label your graph.
 - What does the changing distance between the two lines show?

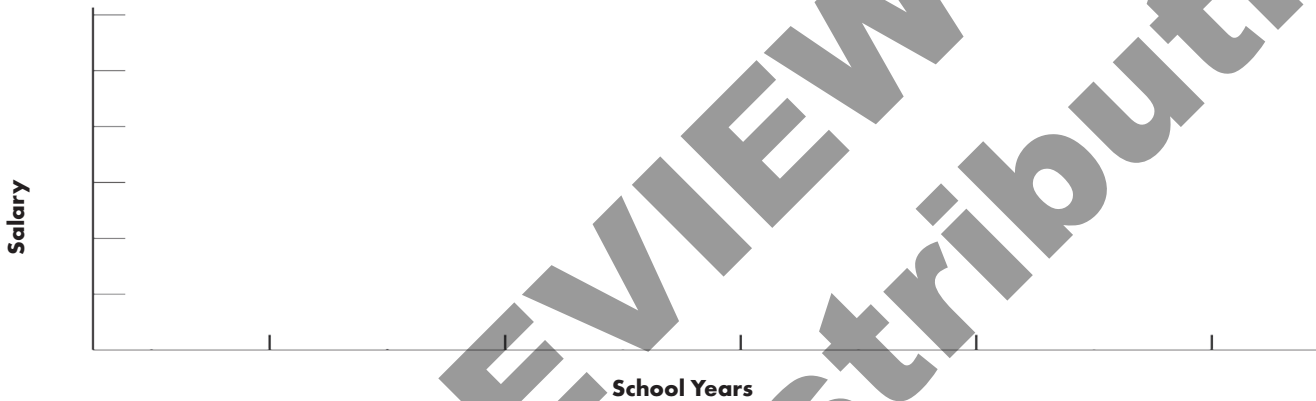


Chart 4

Chart 4 shows Black and white illiteracy rates in Mississippi. Illiterate means unable to read or write.

Year	White	Fraction	Black	Fraction
1900	8.2%		49.1%	50/100
1910	5.2%		35.6%	
1920	3.6%		29.3%	
1930	2.7%		23.2%	

1. Sometimes it is helpful to express statistics in different ways. For example, in 1900, 49.1% of Black people in Mississippi were illiterate. Another powerful way to express this statistic is to say that in 1900, nearly one out of two Black people in Mississippi were illiterate. You can arrive at this calculation by making the percentage into a fraction (see example) and then reducing as much as possible. Sometimes you might need to round off the percentage into a number easily divisible into 100. For example, for the Black illiteracy rate in 1900, you can round off 49.1 to 50.

- Write the fractions for each year in the space provided.
- Express the statistic for white illiteracy in 1910 in a different way. In 1910, about one in _____ white people in Mississippi were illiterate.
- Express the statistic for Black illiteracy in 1930 in a different way. In 1930, about one in _____ Black people in Mississippi were illiterate.

All data is from *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians and the Age of Jim Crow* (University of Illinois Press, 1990) by Neil R. McMillen.

Civics Lessons for Student Engagement

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Civics Lessons for Student Engagement is part of a continuing series on current and historical international issues published by the Choices Program at Brown University. Choices materials place special emphasis on the importance of educating students in their participatory role as citizens.



BROWN
Department of History