

# Activity 10

## Sarah's Long Walk Against Unfairness

In 1848, a five year old African American girl named Sarah Roberts had to walk past five white public schools on her way to the all black Abiel Smith School. Her father, Benjamin Roberts, felt that this was unfair because it segregated students based on the color of their skin. He believed that schools should be integrated and open to all children.

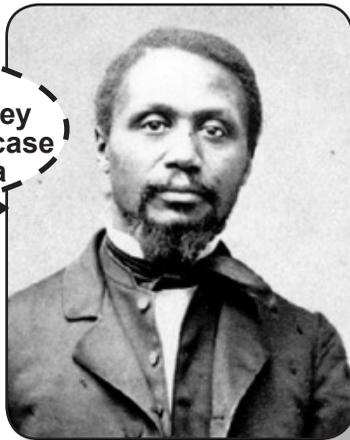
Mr. Roberts had two important lawyers to help him fight against this unfair treatment of his daughter Sarah.

**Robert Morris**

and

**Charles Sumner**

First  
black attorney  
to win a jury case  
in America



### The Argument for Integration

Mr. Morris and Mr. Sumner brought Sarah's case before the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. They argued that....

- The school is the little world in which the child is trained for the larger world of life
- Segregated schools are unfair to both black and white students
- Separate schools are against the State of Massachusetts's promise of equality for all

### The Argument for Segregation

The lawyer for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts argued that....

- Sarah had not been kept from public school instruction and had no reason to complain about her walk to school which was only twelve hundred feet
- The Abiel Smith school was "as good as any other school in the city"
- The School Committee had the legal right to create separate schools for black and white children

## The Decision

Judge Lemuel Shaw did not agree with Morris and Sumner and declared that as long as there were equal schools then black and white students did not need to go to school together.

Although Mr. Roberts did not win his case, he did not give up! For the next six years, Mr. Roberts continued the fight for black and white students to go to school together.

He worked with leaders from the community such as William Cooper Nell as they organized a boycott of the Abiel Smith School, asking parents to teach their children from home rather than send them to a segregated and unequal school. They also began getting people to sign petitions demanding that the schools be integrated.

Finally after many years of hard work, the petitions to the state lawmakers were successful. In 1855, the State of Massachusetts declared that separate public schools were unfair and that black and white students would go to school together.

Sometimes in life we are not always treated fairly, and we have to stand up for what we believe in just like Sarah did. Please use the space below to write a letter to Sarah describing a time when you had to stand up against something you thought was unfair.

Dear Sarah,