



# Constitution Day

## Celebrate Constitution Day with the National Park Service and Your Classroom

Constitution Day is a federal holiday that celebrates the signing of the Constitution. On September 17, 1787, 39 members of the Constitutional Convention signed the Constitution in hope of creating a more perfect union between the United States of America.

The signers sent the document to the American people in anticipation they would ratify it, therefore, making it law. At least nine of the thirteen states needed to ratify the Constitution. On June 21, 1788, nine months after the convention, New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify the Constitution.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution states that every citizen is granted "equal protection of the laws." After the Civil War, African Americans were denied their equal protection through the practice of segregation. In some parts of the United States, African Americans were treated as second class citizens because their constitutional rights were denied.

The practice of legal segregation in public schools was challenged in the *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court case. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court determined African-American children were denied equal protection of the law because of segregation. The decision ended segregation in public schools and many of the constitutional rights denied to African Americans were restored.



Independence National Historic Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was the site where the Constitution was signed on September 17, 1787.

To celebrate Constitution Day, Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site will have a mock signing of the Constitution on September 16-18. A limited supply of free pocket Constitutions are available to visitors during the celebration.

To learn more about the Constitution, teachers and students can visit these sites:

<http://www.constitutionfacts.com/>

- Take a quiz to test your knowledge of the Constitution.

<http://www.constitutioncenter.org/constitution-day/display/MainS/Home>

- Lesson plans and other activities for teachers from the National Constitution Center.

<http://www.constitutioncenter.org/constitution>

- Students and teachers can view the Constitution digitally and learn how to understand it.

<http://www.nps.gov/inde/>

- Visit Independence Hall and see where the Constitution was signed.

<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/>

- Virtually explore a copy of the Constitution and 99 other important documents in American history.

[http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution\\_founding\\_fathers.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution_founding_fathers.html)

- Learn about the 55 members who attended the Constitutional Convention.

# Constitution Day Activity

Students may see the Constitution as a dead document which had its moment in history, some may not understand it, and others believe it has no effect on their daily lives. The truth is the Constitution is not lost in history, students can learn to understand it, and it does have a direct impact on every student's life. By studying *Brown v. Board of Education*, students can understand how the Constitution affects their daily life.

In this activity, students will examine the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution. The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment was used to justify "separate but equal." Later, the amendment was used to end segregation and recently used to limit school integration policies. To understand the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, students have to read it and know how it has been interpreted. For this activity, students will examine *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District* to see how the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment has been interpreted.

## Procedure:

Have the students split into groups of three. Assign each student in the group one of the cases listed on the worksheet below and have them answer the questions to that particular case. Allow the students to share their findings with the group. After each student has shared their findings, have the group answer the discussion questions at the end of the activity sheet.

Bring the class together and quickly review the questions to each case. When finished, allow the class to share their answers to the discussion questions at the end of the activity sheet. Teachers can facilitate further discussions by allowing the students to debate the answers to the questions.

## Kansas Standards for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade:

Civics: Benchmarks 1,2,3,4

History: 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Benchmarks 6 & 7

8<sup>th</sup> Grade Benchmarks 3 & 4

# New Visitor Center Opening at Central High School for Fiftieth Anniversary

In an attempt to fulfill the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*, nine African-American students from Little Rock, Arkansas tried to integrate Central High School. On September 23, 1957, with the aid of local police, the nine students entered the high school. Angry segregationist mobs met the students outside the school to intimidate them from entering. Mob violence became a problem and the nine African-American students were removed from Central High School by National Guard troops for their safety.

The events at Central High School were broadcast across the nation. President Dwight D. Eisenhower supported integration of public schools and used his executive power to ensure Central High School became integrated. He ordered the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to escort the nine African-American students into Central High School. He also federalized

the Arkansas National Guard to keep them out of the hand of the segregationist Governor Orval Faubus.

On September 25, 1957, the nine students integrated Central High School with the aid of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. Troops remained at Central High School for the rest of the school year to protect the students.

Little Rock Central High School became a unit of the National Park Service on November 6, 1998. To commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event, the National Park Service will open a new visitor center. Other events are planned for the public. For more information, visit the Little Rock Central High School NHS website at <http://www.nps.gov/chsc/>. Lesson plans, teachers' guides, and other education opportunities are available on the website.



Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas was the scene of the first major test of the *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court decision.



## *Plessy v. Ferguson*

In 1890, the state of Louisiana passed a law requiring equal but separate train cars for the comfort of its racially diverse passengers. Homer Plessy wanted to challenge the law so he boarded a passenger car for whites only on June 7, 1892. He was arrested for attempting to ride the segregated car despite being only 1/8 African American. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court examined the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. Plessy argued the Louisiana law requiring trains to segregate their passenger cars according to race violated the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The U.S. Supreme Court disagreed with Plessy. It ruled the Louisiana law did not violate the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment as long as there were “separate but equal” passenger cars for both races.

- Read the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment
- Based on your interpretation of the equal protection clause, did the Louisiana law requiring trains to segregate their passenger cars violate the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment? Why?
- How would this decision effect the lives of Americans in 1896?
- How would it effect students' lives in 1896?

## *Brown v. Board of Education*

The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) began its legal campaign to end segregation by challenging the unequal conditions of segregated schools. They were able to win many legal victories. The courts ordered that segregated schools be made physically equal but they were not able to end the practice of segregation. A new strategy was needed. The NAACP began to look for communities who wanted to challenge segregation directly and they found them in Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, and Washington, D.C. In 1952, the U.S. Supreme Court heard the arguments set forth by the NAACP on the collection of cases from the five communities under the heading *Brown v. Board of Education*. The NAACP argued that no matter how physically equal segregated schools were, they were inherently unequal because of the negative psychological effects of segregation on African-American school children. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed with the NAACP and on May 17, 1954, and announced the decision to end segregation in public schools.

- Read the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment
- Based on your interpretation of the Equal Protection Clause, did allowing segregation in public schools violate the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment? Why?
- How would this decision effect the lives of Americans in 1954?
- How would it effect students' lives in 1954?

## *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School Dist.*

Parents from Seattle, Washington and Louisville, Kentucky disagreed with their school district's policy on achieving racial diversity in its student population. The policies used race to determine which school a student could attend. The parents argued that assigning students to different schools because of their race violated the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Lower federal courts disagreed with the parents. In the Seattle case, the court allowed the school district to use race as a "tie breaker" in deciding which schools students could attend. For the Louisville case, the court determined the policy did not violate the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment if it was in the interest of creating racially diverse schools. The parents appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court and on June 28, 2007, a decision was announced. The U.S. Supreme Court overturned the lower courts' decisions by a 5-4 vote. The majority determined the school policies in Louisville and Seattle violated the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment because it used race as a determining factor.

- Read the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment
- Based on your interpretation of the Equal Protection Clause, did Seattle and Louisville public schools violate the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment? Why?
- How will this decision effect the lives of Americans today?
- How will it effect students' lives today?

### Discussion Questions:

- How does the Constitution effect peoples' lives?
- How does the *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court case effect peoples' lives?
- *Plessy, Brown*, and the Seattle and Louisville cases all cited the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Do their interpretations of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment agree or disagree with each other? Why?
- Is diversity a good enough reason to discriminate based on race?

### The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment:

Section 1. 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. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.