

Lesson Plan: Why Are Schools Still Segregated?

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Featured Resources

Above the Noise: [Are Schools Getting More Segregated?](#)

The Lowdown: [Why Are America's Public Schools Still So Segregated?](#)



Opening quick write prompt:

Would you describe your school as diverse? Why or why not? Do most students who attend your school come from the neighborhood or town where your school is located or do many students come from elsewhere in your region? Why do you think this is?

A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.

Objective

- Students will analyze the factors that led to school desegregation efforts and how those efforts succeeded or failed over time.
- Students will evaluate and reflect on the question of why schools remain segregated and the potential consequences of school re-segregation.

Assessment/Reflection

Why are schools still segregated? What factors led to school desegregation, as well as to school re-segregation, in many areas? How does school segregation or integration affect student achievement?

More than 60 years after the landmark school segregation case *Brown v. Board of Education*, America's public schools have become much more segregated even as they have enrolled more students of colors than ever before. White students are typically concentrated in schools with other white students, highly segregated by race and income. Meanwhile, students of color, especially African American and Latino students are concentrated in low-income schools. This trend is no longer only a problem in Southern states with a history of legal segregation but exists in diverse, left-leaning states like California, Illinois and New York. School segregation often has serious negative consequences for students of color, leading to lower achievement and graduation rates. Conversely, when schools are integrated, students of color achieve in greater numbers while white students experience no negative outcomes. This lesson

will explore the factors that led to school desegregation and re-segregation, and ask students to reflect on these factors through the lens of their own school experience.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the activity, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

| Word | Simple definition |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| busing (n.) | The act of bringing children by bus to a school that is farther from where they live so that the school will be more racially diverse. <i>School busing programs were controversial but made it possible for students from diverse neighborhoods to attend the same school.</i> |
| concentrated (adj.) | Not spread out; contained in a small space or area <i>Both white students and students of color are now concentrated in schools with students who look like them rather than in more integrated schools.</i> |
| detrimental (adj.) | Causing damage or harm <i>Segregating students of color is detrimental to their achievement.</i> |
| diversity (n.) | Having people of who are different races or cultures in a group or organization. <i>The diversity of many schools in the South increased dramatically when segregation was outlawed by the Supreme Court and backed by laws.</i> |
| segregation (n.) | The practice of separating a race, class or group from the rest of society <i>School segregation by race is illegal. But many schools are still segregated based on income and neighborhood. This means most white students attend schools that are majority white, and students of color attend schools with other students of color.</i> |

Investigate

- Discuss the quick-write prompt to gauge student perceptions of their school's diversity. Students may have differing views about what constitutes diversity. Call on a variety of students to share. Remind students of class norms for respectful discussion, if needed.
 - **Note:** To learn more about discussing sensitive topics, check out [this post](#) from the New York Times Learning Network.

- Display your school and/or school district’s demographic information and ask students: Based on this demographic data, is our school diverse? Why or why not? Ask students to use the data to support their answer. Your demographic data may not include the aspects of diversity students mentioned when discussing the quick write, so factor that into the discussion.
- As a class, decide on a definition of *diversity*. Use the basic definition (see above) as a starting point, then invite students to add other elements, if relevant (e.g. class, gender, etc.). Write the definition on the board.
- **Ask:** Do you think having diversity in schools and other places is valuable? Why or why not? Then ask: Do you think, in general, schools have become more diverse over time or more segregated over time? Why?
- **Explain:** School segregation was once legal, and then it was outlawed by both the Supreme Court and federal laws. It is no longer legal to keep a student from enrolling in a school based on race. However, after the first push in the 1970s and 1980s to integrate, momentum shifted and schools began to re-segregate.
- **Ask:** Since racial segregation is illegal, what other factors do you think led to schools re-segregating? Call on a few students to share their ideas. Encourage students to draw from their own experience, if relevant.
- Tell students they will learn more about school segregation and integration in the [Above the Noise episode](#):
 - **Stop the video at 1:24 and ask:** What did the Supreme Court decide in *Brown v. Board*? (A: Students cannot be separate by race. Separate schools are inherently unequal.)
 - **Stop at 2:09:** What happened to finally end segregation in the South? How long did this take? (A: Court orders and busing policies—see the definition of *busing* above.)
 - **Stop at 2:23:** What was the effect of school integration the black student achievement? What was the effect on white student achievement? (A: Positive effect on black students, no effect on white students.)
 - **Stop at 3:08:** What are two factors that have led to school re-segregation? (A: Conservative courts rolling back integration laws and “white flight.”)
 - **Stop at 4:17:** What do advocates say are the advantages of “self-segregation”? (A: Students avoid long bus rides and go to school in their own community, segregation by race is still illegal, school choice is seen as important.)
 - **Stop at 4:46:** What do other advocates say are the benefits of school diversity? (A: Students are more comfortable with diversity, avoid stereotypes and are better prepared for the real world.)
 - **At the end of the video, ask students the final question:** How do you think your school’s diversity has affected your education? Call on a few students to share their views.

- **Explain:** Students will now dive into the data referenced by the [Above the Noise video](#) and examine how school districts look today. They will also read more about the history of segregation and integration.
- As a class, display the first map on [The Lowdown](#). Call on volunteers to explain the map.
- Individually or in small groups, students read [The Lowdown](#).
- **Check for understanding** after students read The Lowdown post: What had to happen for schools to finally start integrating? What were factors that led to the current re-segregation?
- For a deeper look at the issue of busing to combat persistent racial segregation in Charlotte, North Carolina, schools, check out this Retro Report video: [The Battle for School Busing](#). (*Note: The n-word is used once in a clip of an anti-segregation speech.*)
- **Transition to the Make and Share:** Tell students they will have a chance to share their response to this issue in the comments section of The Lowdown. The first time they comment, students must sign in to [Disqus](#), a free discussion app embedded in The Lowdown.
 - To sign in to [Disqus](#), click the “Comments” button at the bottom of the post.
 - Click the blue “Get Started” button in the gray “Welcome to Disqus” box.
 - Students will need to enter a username. We recommend first name, last initial.
 - After signing in for the first time, students must verify their email address before commenting. A verification email will appear in their inbox once they sign in to Disqus.

Investigate

- Individually or in small groups, students post in the comments section in response to their
 - Responses should be supported by evidence from the Above the Noise episode, The Lowdown post, or other research on the topic.
 - Encourage students to reply to other comments after posting their response. Remind them to use evidence to support their claims and respectful language when replying.
- Students can create their own response or use the following question as a starting point:
 - **Make your case:** Should school integration be forced, or should parents be able to send their children to the school of their choice? Support your statement with evidence about benefits or drawbacks.

Assessment/Reflection

- Students reflect on what they have learned either through a class discussion or in writing:

- o What have you learned about this issue? Did your opinion change or stay the same as you learned more about the issue?
- o What was it like to post your responses publically and reply to other posts? What did you learn from other students? What do you hope they learned from you? What will you do the next time you post a comment in response to The Lowdown?

Circle chats, small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension/Homework

Write/speak locally: Students turn their response to this issue into a letter, short speech or presentation, then research ways to make their voice heard in their community. (Example: Speaking during the public comment section of a city council meeting, posting in an online forum, etc.) For a list of how to contact local officials in your area, check out [KQED Learning's Local Election Toolkit](#).

Common Core, NGSS and C3 standards

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| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 | Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. |
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 | Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. |
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1 | Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. |
| NGSS.SEP.7 | Engaging in argument from evidence |
| NGSS.SEP.8 | Obtaining, evaluating and communicating information |
| D2.Civ.13.6-8 | Analyze the purposes, implementation, and consequences of public policies in multiple settings. |

Common Core, NGSS and C3 standards

