

Classroom Spice

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Brown v. Board of Education

“Why Do We Have to Study These Old White Guys?”

As we draw near the 50th anniversary of the landmark Brown decision, perhaps we should stop and reflect on its impact on American schools and society. On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court handed down a *unanimous decision* stating that separate schools based solely on race were unconstitutional. (There is not time here to delve into the politics involved in Chief Justice Earl Warren’s dedication to ensure that this decision was unanimous. However, it is interesting and/or unnerving to think that as controversial as the decision was, what would have happened had it not been unanimous? It would well be worth your time to research into the behind the scenes politics of this historical case.)

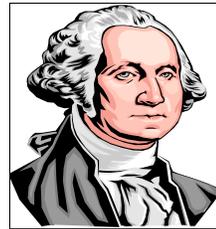
Most people have a narrow vision of the Brown Case. They think of it as *one* little girl in Topeka. The case did focus on Linda Brown, a third grader who had to walk a mile, through a railroad switchyard to get to her bus stop to then be bussed to a black school, even though there was a white elementary school only blocks from her home. However, Linda was only one of twenty children who attempted to enroll in white schools in Topeka that fall and were denied. It was part of a concerted effort by the NAACP to bring a lawsuit against Topeka to chal-

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Yes, this was an actual comment made by an elementary school student during a 1997-1998 study on elementary student attitudes toward social studies instruction. The study under the direction of Dr. Melinda Karnes showed that 92% of the third -eighth grade students surveyed ranked their social studies classes as uninteresting and/or only somewhat interesting. They saw at most only a weak relationship between their lives and history. While I am in no way suggesting we stop teaching about George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, I am suggesting we re-look at what social studies curriculum we teach and how we teach it.

We could use the survey results previously mentioned as a stepping stone to totally revamp social studies education to include more relevance to students’ lives, multiple perspectives, and more minority connections. However, for this issue, in light of the upcoming women’s history month, we will limit discussion to the relevance of those findings on approximately 50 percent of the school population, girls.

A well-known social scientist, Mary Kay Thompson Tereault has summarized five ways in which social studies texts and the curriculum in general portray women. Of course the most obvious is when the male experience throughout history is the only story told with no mention of the women’s roles, i.e., **male-defined history**. While there has been an attempt to shift away from this perspective, with what is it replaced?



The most common is where history is told from the male perspective, but now it is noted that women did play a part, but the implication is that it was not a significant part, and therefore not worth discussing. This is entitled **contribution history**. The third approach, **bifocal history**, involves describing both male and female contributions, but continues to promote the belief that the male experience was dominant. The fourth and fifth categories are histories of women and histories of gender. In the former, socio-economics and personal

characteristics of women are recognized, while in the latter both male and female contributions are interwoven based on such factors as experience and accomplishments.

So what teaching ramifications can come from this Tereault’s analysis and the Karnes research? First, inclusion of both male and female contributions, being sure to not have the female contributions appear as a tag along. If information is presented **chronologically**, and not by importance, this is less likely to occur. Use multiple sources, not just texts, and a variety of teaching methods. Equal representation is more likely to happen if you use videos, online resources, the library, guest speakers, and historical societies. Make sure the classroom environment reflects the content and both genders (as well as differing ethnicities/races) when possible. Make the unit appear relevant and inviting to all students. History is not just a story about “old white guys!” Men, women, and children, of all colors and nationalities played important roles in our history.

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Taking a Look at African American Contributions

Most people are unaware of how many things they use each day were invented by African Americans. Imagine what life would be like if you were denied use of just some of the inventions that African Americans made:

You get up you in the morning and try and get ready for the world, but oops there is no hair brush (Lydia O. Newman) or comb (Walter Sammons). You have to wear wrinkled clothes because there is no ironing board (Sarah Boone) or clothes dryer (George T. Samon). You go to put on your shoes but alas, they are falling apart (Jan Matzelinger). Breakfast is interesting as there is no refrigerator (John Standard). You notice the floor needs cleaning, but you can't find a dustpan (Lloyd P. Ray), and there's no mop (Thomas W. Stewart). As you leave the house you notice the lawn needs mowing, but you realize you don't have a lawn mower (John Burr). You can't drive to school as the family car is a standard —the automatic transmission doesn't exist (contributions by Richard Spikes and Joseph Gammell). There is no transit system either, as its precursor was the now un-invented electric trolley (Elbert Robinson). Sorry, guess you'll have to walk. However you get to school is a nightmare anyway, as there are no traffic lights for all the standard transmission cars (traffic light courtesy of Garrett Morgan). At school you are either too cold (heating furnace invented by Alice Parker) or too hot (air conditioner courtesy of Frederick Jones). You try to get busy working but can't find a sharpened pencil (John Love), a pen (William Purvis), or a typewriter (Lee Burrige). You are glad it's a sunny day as there are no light bulbs (Lewis Howard Latimer invented the filament within the light bulb). You think about your mother who works on the 12th floor of the hospital, and think of what great shape she has to be in to walk up and down the stairs several times each day (elevator invented by Alexander Miles), and how difficult it is for her to be a surgeon when there is no blood bank (Dr. Charles Drew).

We could go on and on, but we think you get the picture. Look up the following names and see if what they invented has impacted you or someone you know.

Elijah J. McCoy (He's associated with the phrase "The Real McCoy." What did he invent?)

Garret A. Morgan (Hint—Firefighters and WWI & Iraqi Freedom soldiers used this.)

Marie Van Brittan Brown (Hint, think *smaller* than "Homeland" Security)

Harry C. Hopkins (Hint, rock musicians are prone to needing this earlier than most.)

Frederick J. Jones (Hint—Braums' customers really appreciate his work.)

J. R. Winter (Hint, think of older apartments and tall buildings.)

Charles H. Turner (Hint, he might have enjoyed the movie "It's a Bug's Life.")

George Olden (Hint—a philatelist's hero)

(Brown Case—cont'd from page 1)

lunge the “separate but equal” doctrine promoted under the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. At the time, Kansas law permitted cities of more than 15,000 to establish separate facilities for black and white students. The Brown case actually included the other 19 Topeka children, but in addition it subsumed similar lawsuits from Delaware, South Carolina, and Virginia, truly making it a class action case. While the cases differed in conditions, ranging from South Carolina which had markedly different facilities for “colored” and “White,” to Kansas with a much closer parity of schools, they all shared the commonality that their schools were segregated “by law.”

Interestingly enough, the key finding in the Brown decision was not based on legal precedence or the history of the 14th Amendment. It was not decided based on what the forefathers were thinking when they wrote the constitution or what the authors who revised it in the 14th Amendment were thinking, but rather on social science and psychological research, common sense, justice and fairness. Did it abolish all segregation in public places, such as restaurants, transportation, or restrooms? No. The decision impacted only schools. And even at that it did not have a timetable. How quickly, or slowly, could integration be implemented? After a year, with virtually no implementation taking place the courts had to once again step in and make a decision. While the NAACP hoped for immediate implementation, the court recommended that schools should desegregate “with all deliberate speed.” Desegregating schools was a giant step in the Civil Rights Movement.

Whether it was Linda Brown, any of the other 19

Topeka children, Ruby Bridges, the Little Rock Nine, or James Meredith, students played an important, and often dangerous, role in the civil rights movement.



The Literature Connection

The focus of this issue’s literature connection is African American literature. Most teachers/students are familiar with some of the classics by Mildred Taylor (*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*), Verna Aardema (*Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears*), and Faith Ringgold (*Tar Beach*), but there is so much more available. An excellent resource to help identify great books dealing with African American topics is *Great Books for African-American Children* by Pamela Toussaint (published by Penguin, ISBN 0-452-28044-3). While it is currently out of print you might be able to find one in a library, and there are copies on line through amazon.com.

But do not let its title fool you, these books are not just for African-American children, they are for *all* children. It introduces books for very young children through young adults. It provides age appropriate guidelines, reviews, honors earned, main value points, publishing information, and related questions for teachers/parents to start meaningful exploration of the value topics. This is a must for any library.

Did you know that over 5000 black men fought in the Revolutionary War? There is a well written book *Come All You Brave*



Soldiers: Blacks in the Revolutionary War written by Clinton Cox, published by Scholastic, ISBN 0-590-47577-0, which talks about some of these courageous individuals. It provides a different perspective on the Revolutionary War which will be most appropriate for middle school and older students. Students and teachers alike will find this to be a very interesting and informative book.

Who has not heard of Jackie Robinson?

His breaking barriers in baseball is well known. But that is just part of his life story. Sharon Robinson, Jackie’s daughter, has written an inspiring book about her father.

Jackie’s Nine: Jackie Robinson’s Values to Live By relates stories of

Sharon’s life, her father’s life, and individuals such as Christopher Reeves, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Oprah Winfrey who exemplify the nine values upon which Jackie led his life. What a wonderful world this would be if we all could live according to these nine values: courage, determination, teamwork, persistence, integrity, citizenship, justice, commitment, and excellence. Give your students, as well as yourself, the opportunity to read a book which reaches out and grabs you.

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Who was Susan B. Anthony?

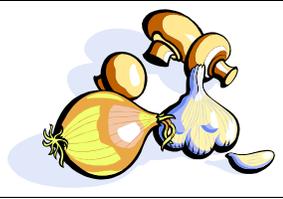
Did you think of a dollar coin? Maybe you thought of suffragettes? Did “nothing” come to mind? Did you by any chance think of a “lawsuit”? Yes, I said lawsuit. Did you know that the dollar coin embossed with the portrait of Susan B. Anthony is actually embossed with the portrait of the “defendant” in a Federal lawsuit? *United States v. Susan B. Anthony* (1873) to be exact. Let us take a moment and look at the interesting life of this influential woman.

Susan Anthony was a Quaker who grew up in an environment of freedom, respect, and equality. Her parents held strong views on many topics and instilled these in Susan. Of particular importance were their opposition to slavery and their support of temper-

ance (avoidance of alcohol). Susan completed her education at the age of 17, and became a teacher in rural New York. However, her inherent belief in justice made her protest the inequity of her being paid one-fifth the salary of male teachers and subsequently cost her, her job. She found a better one working at a girls’ school.

After 10 years she found a new challenge. Being unable to speak at a “Son’s of Temperance” meeting because she was a woman, she proceeded to found the “Daughters of Temperance.” She worked diligently in the temperance movement, and through it met Elizabeth Cady Stanton a strong women’s right advocate. While she worked incessantly on this issue, she did

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In This Issue...

Brown Case, Women & History, African Am. Contributions, Susan B. Anthony, Lit.

What is “Sin”?

It depends on who you ask, but take special note of a quote from Benjamin Mays, Minister, Educator, and former President of Morehouse College. If it is not a Great Expectations quote, it should be!

It must be borne in mind that the tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. It isn't a calamity to die with dreams unfulfilled, but it is a calamity not to dream....

It is not a disgrace not to reach the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for.

Not failure, but low aim is sin.

(Anthony—Cont'd from page 3)
shift her priorities during the Civil War, working for the emancipation of slaves.

In 1868 the Fourteenth Amendment, which declared that “all” people born in the U.S. were citizens and could not be denied their rights, was adopted. However, Section 2 encouraged states to grant “all males” (with the exception of Indians) the right to vote, which many interpreted to mean only males. Anthony was angered at this, believing instead that it should be interpreted to mean that women were citizens and therefore had the right to vote.

Anthony and Stanton urged women to vote regardless of the law. Anthony, after getting Judge Selden’s opinion that the fourteenth amendment could indeed be interpreted to grant women the right to vote, proceeded to register to vote (along with 14 other women). All 15

voted in the presidential election of November 5, 1872, and all 15 were later arrested. All but Anthony chose to pay the exorbitant bail of \$500. Judge Selden personally arranged for Anthony to be released pending her trial. And when the U.S. District court increased the bail to \$1,000 Selden paid that as well. Ultimately only Anthony had to face trial. The Judge presiding at her trial was opposed to woman’s suffrage and wrote his decision **before** the trial began. After denying Anthony the right to testify, he **ordered** the jury to find her guilty, then sentenced her to a \$100 fine. She never did pay the fine. Instead, she continued her work to give women the right to vote, but died before the 19th Amendment was ratified.



(Lit. Connection—Cont'd from page 3)

An informational book appropriate for high school students and adults, is Jim Haskins’ *The Dream and the struggle: Separate but not Equal*, published by Scholastic, ISBN 0-590-45911-2. While the book opens with the Little Rock Nine integration of Central High, it follows black education, or sometimes its absence, from colonial times through the present. The reader will undoubtedly be shocked and saddened, as well as inspired by this well written book.

The African-American Century: How Black Americans Have Shaped Our Country written by Gates and West is a great book for your library. It profiles one hundred of the most influential Africa Americans of the twentieth century from Mary McLeod Bethune to Denzel Washington.