

**Justice in Our Schools:
Who has Paved the Way and How Can We Continue to be Student Leaders?**

**Claire Bowerman, Top of the Mitt Writing Project
Designed for Upper Elementary Students**

My demonstration is meant to support my contentions that:

1. Each student should feel safe in their learning environment.
2. Students need an opportunity to be given a choice when it comes to books that they are reading.
3. Giving students an opportunity to look at history through more than one lens is critical.
4. Students should be able to think critically about historical events and think about how / if injustice/racism/access, etc., continue today.
5. Collaboration and building a classroom community is essential in social studies instruction.
6. Students should be invited to not only “be a reader” but also “read like a writer” and “write like a reader.”
7. Students should be able to come up with actionable wishes to help better our world and be able to articulate them through writing.

Step-by-Step Procedures: (Over a period of 5 days or more)

1. Students will be asked to respond to the following questions (6 minutes to write, 5-6 to discuss):

"Have you ever stood up for something that you thought was unfair or someone who you thought was being treated unfairly? If so, how? What happened?"

"Have you ever seen or heard something that you thought was unfair? Did you say or do something in response? If you didn't respond, why not?"
2. Students will be asked to view two photos and have a group discussion about what they see in both photos. (10 minutes)
3. Students will be reminded that over the past few weeks, we have looked at examples of young people in history who have faced adversity in the hope of change. We can now take a look at the actions and choices of individuals. Before

students get into groups, they will watch a youtube video about Brown vs. Board of Education just for a refresher for some background knowledge.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g41X6_XY1rQ

4. Today, we will split into groups and complete a deep dive into three historical moments that changed the path for many young people and public education.

Students will have about 20 minutes to explore the texts. As you explore each text, I want you to ask yourselves these questions and record your responses for each text:

-who did you read about?

-what did they do?

-where did it happen?

-why did it happen?

-what did they know about what was going on around them?

-what happened because of the actions of this person?

-locate where on a map your story takes place

By the end of the week, students should have the opportunity to view and read all texts.

5. Students will be reminded that there is still segregation happening in schools, but for now we are going to focus on Sylvia Mendez, Yolanda Gladden, Ruby Bridges, and the Little Rock Nine and how they fought for change. We've already learned about them, but we are going to look a bit deeper today.
6. Before students are split into groups, group norms are going to be reviewed so that students know the expectations when they gather.
7. 20 minutes for students to read through their resources and take notes. Be ready to give a 2-minute presentation about their deep dive topic. They can present any way that they want. (see step 4).
8. Action: My Wishes Heart Map: Before we start brainstorming wishes, turn and talk about the Mendez and Bridges quotes and how they could help us form wishes for the world. Personal wishes about yourself and your life, wishes for and about other people, and world wishes (wishes about positive changes you want to see in the world).

9. Hang Heart Maps and look for common wishes.
10. After hearing about Sylvia Mendez, Yolanda Gladden, Ruby Bridges, and the Little Rock Nine, what new questions do you have about segregation?
11. Start to create a “Poem-tree” for the school. Using poems by Langston Hughes, and others.

Extensions and Adaptations:

- Students look at their own community’s history of segregation or discrimination. For instance, students in Harbor Schools could research Holy Childhood Boarding School.
- Students choose activists from American history over a larger period of time to research.
- With your class, you might create a timeline of segregation and the history of segregation in American Public Schools.
- Create and publish a poetry anthology.
- Students think about the lives of the people they read about in the books and create heart maps for Sylvia Mendez, etc. based on their character traits.

Bibliography

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