

INTEGRATING CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL: A ROLE PLAY EXERCISE

Menu of resolutions:

- Central HS should be immediately opened up for any African American who wants to attend.
- A handful of African American honors students may attend Central High School as a test case to determine whether or not integration will work.
- Instead of integrating Central High School, the state should increase funding for a segregated Black School, so that “separate, but equal” means just that.
- Arkansas should create a voluntary integration program for white and black students at a neutral site — a new school that would iron out the problems and create a map for future integration.
- There should be no integration. Central High School should remain segregated and black-only Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School should also remain segregated.

Group Directions:

Your group will attend a meeting of the school board. The question before the board is: Should Central High School be integrated? Your job as a group is to convince the school board to agree to your resolution. You will do this in two ways — by writing convincing reasons to persuade the board and by finding allies who also support your resolution. Remember there is strength in numbers.

1. Your group may choose one of the resolutions listed above or craft one of your own. After you have a resolution, state your reasons for supporting this action. Use evidence from your role.
2. You will choose half of your group as “travelers” who will move to the four other groups and attempt to find allies — people who support your point of view. The more allies you have when you go before the school board, the better chance you have of determining the decision on integrating Central High. You may have to slightly change your resolution to win allies, but you don’t want to change so much that you are no longer consistent with your group’s perspective.

3. Half of the group will stay at “home” and receive visitors and share your perspective and attempt to gain allies as well.
4. After you have determined who your allies are, your group will reconvene and write up a “statement” to be delivered at the school board meeting. In this statement you want to:
 - State who you are — your group’s name.
 - State what you want to happen — your resolution.
 - Give solid reasons for your resolution.

You also want to determine who is going to speak and who is going to answer questions from other groups. Every group member who speaks earns _____ points. **If everyone in your group speaks, you each earn _____ points.**

African American Families Opposing Integration

Let's get one thing straight: You are opposed to segregation and to the Jim Crow laws — written and unwritten — that keep African Americans from gaining true equal rights under the law.

But you aren't sure that putting your children in a school with white children is going to make them better educated. Dunbar Senior High School is the only high school for Blacks in Little Rock. Students come from around the state to attend Dunbar in order to get what many consider the best education. Dunbar is known for its remarkable student body and faculty. You know these teachers have your children's best interest at heart.

You worry that if integration is successful, it will ultimately lead to the defunding of Dunbar High School because white students will not transfer to Black schools. As enrollment decreases, outstanding black teachers and principals may lose their jobs. They will most likely not be hired at Central High School.

You are also concerned about the outbreak of violence that is accompanying integration throughout the South. In 1956, a young African American woman's presence on campus set off rioting at the University of Alabama and the University's authorities forced her withdrawal.

In the past, the jobs, the homes, and the lives of African Americans have been at stake when big changes have been proposed. You see the handwriting on the wall: Those who attempt to integrate are going to be the targets of segregationists. You want change, but you are unwilling to sacrifice your children.

Local Business Owners

The Supreme Court ruled during the famous court case, *Brown v Board of Education*, that segregation in the public schools was unconstitutional. As they stated, "separate schools are inherently unequal." They also said that offending states must desegregate schools with "all deliberate speed."

You are worried about what the Supreme Court decision to desegregate is going to do to your business. It's fine for some judges to say that whites and blacks should go to school together.

You know how much citizens value their children's education. If Central High School is desegregated, white parents are going to take their children and their business to towns where desegregation isn't happening. Who is going to move in? Buy or build new homes? This just isn't smart business.

You don't get why the NAACP is picking on Little Rock when there is an outstanding black high school — Dunbar Senior High School. Is there really a need to integrate in Little Rock?

You've always gotten along with everyone in town. But you are concerned about the violence that might spring up when people are forced to do something they don't want to do.

Business people value stability above all else. This is a radical, unprecedented change and there's no telling what protest and turmoil this integration could bring to Little Rock. Your businesses and communities will suffer.

Governor Faubus

You are up for re-election. In the last election you beat an all-out segregationist at the polls. You've earned a reputation as a moderate. But then the Supreme Court integrated schools with *Brown v. Board of Education*, stating that, "separate schools are inherently unequal." They also said that offending states must desegregate schools with "all deliberate speed."

Folks are mad. Your state was one of the targets of that court decision. The federal government is telling you and the people of your state that you cannot continue to have separate schools for white and black children.

It's true that Arkansas, including Little Rock, integrated buses, but lots of folks in your state want segregation to stay in Arkansas. They did not want to integrate buses, lunch counters, bathrooms, pools, or drinking fountains, and they do not want to integrate schools. Nor do they want the court system to dictate how they educate their children.

These folks who elected you are fuming. You have a situation on your hands. The local NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) is pressuring local school boards to desegregate schools with "all deliberate speed." Nine African American students plan to integrate Central High School in Little Rock.

You have said repeatedly that you will not desegregate schools.

Families of Little Rock Nine:

The Supreme Court ruled during the famous court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, that segregation in the public schools was unconstitutional. As they stated, "separate schools are inherently unequal." They also said that offending states must desegregate schools with "all deliberate speed."

Your children have been chosen by the NAACP to integrate Central High School. In fact, they volunteered to integrate and because of their outstanding academic performance, they were the nine students accepted. All of your families are hard-working, church-going people who expect your children to earn good grades.

While you know that the African American teachers at Dunbar High School are excellent and have high expectations for your children, you also know that Central High School has the money to offer more classes and newer books. They have well-equipped science laboratories.

But more than that you consider this a strike for the recognition of equal rights for African Americans. As one student chosen to integrate wrote, "I hope that if schools open to my people, I will also get access to other opportunities I have been denied... Our people are stretching out to knock down the fences of segregation...I read in the newspaper that one of our people, a woman named Rosa Parks, had refused to give up her seat to a white man on an Alabama bus. Her willingness to be arrested rather than give in one more time led to the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott. I felt such a surge of pride when I thought about how my people had banded together to force a change."

In addition, you understand that the segregation laws that keep blacks and whites separate and unequal must be broken. You and you children know that they are the intellectual equals to the white students who attend the school. There is no reason except racism for black students to attend poorly funded schools.

It may be rough going for awhile, but nothing in life comes easy. In the long run, the sacrifices of your families will benefit all African Americans and the country as a whole.

N.A.A.C.P
(National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)

You celebrated the victory of *Brown v Board of Education* when the Supreme Court ruled that segregation in the public schools was unconstitutional. As they stated, "separate schools are inherently unequal." They also said that offending states must desegregate schools with "all deliberate speed."

The victory was sweet, not because it immediately desegregated the Jim Crow schools, but because it gave you the prize you had been seeking for fifty-eight years: the declaration by the nation's highest court that such segregation was now unconstitutional.

Before this you had the moral conviction that these schools were wrong and contrary to the guarantees of American citizenship. You have been forced to go to back doors. You were forced to live in hollows and alleys and back streets. You were forced to step off sidewalks and to remove your hats and call anyone white, "Sir" or "Ma'am." If schools were provided, your children went to shanties while whites went to schools. Your children used hand-me-down books and school supplies. You rode in the rear seats of buses and trolleys and in the dirty, dangerous front end of coaches of the trains. You could not vote. You were beaten, shot, and burned and no man was punished for the crime.

Slowly in this fifty-eight years, you have wiped out lynching. You knocked out the strongest barriers to voting. Men and women are working at more and better jobs and at better and better wages.

Now, your children, at long last are to have equality in education. *You recognize that you must use the law to push for integration as swiftly as possible in every community where segregated schools still exist. **The law is now on your side.*** This generation of children will receive the education they deserve.