

LESSON: Civic Engagement and the Significance of Petitions

GRADE LEVEL: Middle School

SUBJECT: Civics, Government, Public Activism

TIME REQUIRED: 45 minutes

This lesson is meant to exemplify and expand upon ideas of civic participation and petitioning.

RATIONALE

Petition-writing offers citizens an opportunity to engage with the ideas and values of their community.

Following the ruling of *Brown v. Board*, this petition employs civic engagement in order to apply national rulings to local organizations.

NOTE: This lesson is designed as part of a series on types of political activism. It can be adapted to fit a unit of this topic as needed.

This lesson plan and materials needed to teach it can be found at the Thurgood Marshall Institute: <https://tminstituteldf.org/>

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How can ordinary citizens interact with and influence their local and national governments?
- What elements are a part of a petition?
- What are the benefits and limitations of petitions?
- To what extent could petitions encourage the ruling of *Brown v. Board*?

OUTCOMES AND OBJECTIVES

After the lesson, students will...

- Define what a petition is and how it is used.
- Analyze how petitions can be useful in making change.
- Question the relationship between the NAACP petition and *Brown v. Board*.

PREPARING TO TEACH

- Students should have an introductory understanding of *Brown v. Board* and the ideas and policies of desegregation prior to this lesson.
- Teachers should:
 - Share copies of the petition with each student (pg. 170-171 of Binder 1).
 - Print and share copies of the graphic organizer with each student.

SCAFFOLDS AND ACCOMMODATIONS TO SUPPORT LEARNERS

Reading support...

If needed, any of the following supports can be provided for students in order to facilitate reading and comprehension.

- Teachers may help students to rewrite the petition as they read it.
- Teachers may offer students time to ask questions about the petition and its language prior to filling out the graphic organizer. Teachers might also find it helpful to provide sheets about the vocabulary of the petition and this lesson prior to learning.

Differentiation...

Ideas for reading support mentioned above can be helpful for adjusting this lesson to match different classes and students. Additionally, teachers should always consider how verbal and/or written instructions might best benefit their class. Teachers may also consider how small groups can be sized up or down to best benefit students.

Adjusting for high school grades...

Teachers may consider allowing older students to read the petition in their pairs or individually instead of as a whole class. Teachers may also select a different assessment style depending on the capabilities of the class.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES SEQUENCE

1. Review any necessary information/history with students to prepare them for the content of the lesson.
2. Invite students to read through the petition as a whole class. Reading can be done by the teacher (with interjections to support understanding) or by student(s) in the class.
3. Allow students time to complete the reading graphic organizer in pairs.
4. Coming back together as a whole class, encourage students to share their answers to the graphic organizer question. Record their ideas on a large whiteboard or piece of paper as students share.
5. Ask students how they would define a petition and its parts. Come to a class consensus about what a petition is. Some ideas might include:
 - a. a way to explain to a government what its people think
 - b. a written request for something in a community
 - c. a collection of signatures
6. Organize students into small groups and invite them to consider the following questions:
 - a. What is special about this petition?
 - b. Why do you think the NAACP chose a petition as a way to support desegregation?
 - c. How do you think this petition might have helped with desegregation? What challenges might have happened AGAINST this petition?
 - d. Are petitions useful? Do you think petitions can cause big change in American communities?

7. Allow students time to represent the ideas of their discussion in one of the following assessment forms (teacher may choose one form for the whole class or allow students assessment choice). Assessments can be completed in class (if time allows) or for homework.

ASSESSMENT

Following the lesson, students may represent their learning by:

- Writing their own petition about an issue of their choice.
- Writing a reflection essay (one page) on why petitions matter.
- Designing a visual representation of how petitions can influence people and governments.
- Explaining the relationship between the NAACP petition and *Brown v. Board* (visually, through writing, or otherwise).

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR ENRICHMENT

| Questions to Consider | Responses |
|--|----------------------|
| What is the main idea of each paragraph of the petition? | 1. 2. 3. 4. |
| Who is the petition for? Who would be reading this letter? What do the authors want the readers to do? | |
| What inspired the authors to write this petition? | |

What next steps have the authors established in their petition?