

LESSON: Not Just *Brown* - Desegregation and Hispanic Students

GRADE LEVEL: Middle School

SUBJECT: Social Studies/History

TIME REQUIRED: 45 mins

This lesson will cover the *Mendez v. Westminster* case.

RATIONALE

The teaching of this lesson is meant to introduce students to one of the precursor cases that helped set the foundations for the *Brown* argument, the *Mendez v. Westminster* case.

NOTE: This lesson should be taught right before teaching the *Brown* decision, and it can be taught when learning about things such as Japanese internment or racial discrimination pre-WWII.

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

OVERVIEW

This lesson is intended to expose students to the *Mendez* case, an influential court decision that impacted the *Brown* decision years later. This lesson is designed to teach students about the *Mendez* case so that when they learn about *Brown*, they can compare the two cases.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is fairness?
- Are kids entitled to quality education?

OUTCOMES AND OBJECTIVES

After the lesson, students will be able to articulate what the *Mendez* case is about and use that information to better understand the *Brown* decision.

PREPARING TO TEACH

Familiarize yourself with the *Mendez* case and think about its relationship to *Brown*. Make sure students have some understanding of the racist policies put in place due to *Plessy v. Ferguson* and expand that scope to include other minorities besides Black people.

SCAFFOLDS AND ACCOMMODATIONS TO SUPPORT LEARNERS

Reading support....

The reading should be accessible for students, especially since much of the modality is illustrated.

Differentiation...

If you want to provide more difficult differentiation, provide the opinion from the *Mendez* case for students to read, or increase the requirements for the assessment.

Adjusting for high school grades...

For high school students, assign the book as homework and read the case itself in class together. Then give them examples of Japanese internment and apply that situation to the *Mendez* logic, and have them write an opinion on how *Mendez* should be applied to interned Japanese Americans.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES SEQUENCE

Begin class by asking the essential questions and having students write a one- to two-sentence personal response. Then read *Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation*. Since this is a book designed for late elementary students, it should be a quick read for students. The reading can be done as a whole class reading or in small groups to help give developing readers scaffolds to help with comprehension. After reading the book, students will write a summary of what the *Mendez* case was about. They should be answering the questions: What caused the *Mendez* family to file the lawsuit? What was their specific problem? What did the court decide was right? Why is this case important in American history? This writing assignment should be a first draft that can later be revised to practice revision skills.

ASSESSMENT

The assessment will be the summary writing task where teachers can see if the student has an understanding of what happened during the case. This is also an opportunity to assess and develop writing skills around summary writing. The instructions for the writing assessment are below:

Write a summary paragraph of Separate Is Never Equal. To help you think about what to write about, here are some questions you should be able to answer to help someone know what happened in the book: What caused the Mendez family to file the lawsuit? What was their specific problem? What did the court decide was right? Why is this case

important in American history? We will be revising this paragraph later; this is a first draft.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR ENRICHMENT

[Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation, a book by Duncan Tonatiuh \(bookshop.org\)](#)