

# Classroom Discussion Guide

In October  
1961, They  
Became the  
Smallest  
Pioneers of the  
Civil Rights  
Movement...



# The Memphis 13

# Contents

## The Memphis 13 Classroom Discussion Guide

<b>Using This Guide</b>	2
<b>Before Watching the Film</b>	
Activity: The First Day of School	3
History: Racial Segregation in American Public Education	4
– From <i>Roberts</i> to <i>Plessy</i>	4
– The Campaign to End Public School Segregation	5
– <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i>	6
– All Deliberate Speed and Implementation of <i>Brown</i>	7
Activity: What Would You Do?	8
History: School Desegregation in Memphis	9
– Early Aftermath of <i>Brown</i> in Memphis	9
– Meet the Memphis 13	10
<b>After Watching the Film</b>	
Conversations & Activities	11
– Choices in the Post- <i>Brown</i> Era:	
How do the choices of individuals impact history?	11
Activity: Choices	12
– There’s Never a Perfect Time to Walk Through Fire:	
What is the proper role of children in social movements?	13
Activity: Gallery Walk	14
– 13 People, 13 Stories:	
How do we tell complicated stories of history?	15
Activity: Oral Histories	16
History: Memphis School Desegregation From Then to Now	17
Facilitators’ Guide: Additional Thought Questions	18

Please feel free to take advantage of additional content, such as videos, photographs, and links to resources on school desegregation in Memphis and nationally, available at [www.thememphis13.com](http://www.thememphis13.com).

# Using this Guide

In making *The Memphis 13*, my goal was to not only share an important and untold story of the Civil Rights Movement, but to challenge viewers to consider the ways in which the themes present during this historic moment remain present today. I therefore hope that the film serves as a jumping off point for interesting discussions about issues of inclusion, tolerance, and education – especially in classrooms. This guide is intended to aid in allowing viewers to continue a conversation that *The Memphis 13* seeks to begin. It is organized in several different ways.

First, it includes a portion (pages 3-10) that could be helpful *before* watching the film. This section consists of historical background information to set the context for the stories of the Memphis 13 as well as several activities and questions intended to trigger introspection on the film’s themes as a sort of primer for the movie itself. Second, this guide includes a series of conversations (pages 11-17), including questions to facilitate discussion, about several of topics I returned to repeatedly as I worked on this project. These conversations probably would be most effective *after* a viewing of the film.

In addition, this guide contains several elements included throughout. For example, “Thought Questions” are included to aid classroom leaders in helping spur thought and discussion. These questions could be triggers for student reflection papers or journal entries. In addition, the guide suggests several more explicit student activities, inviting students to draw from or build upon the film to generate other learning opportunities.

The guide can be used in its entirety as a several day curriculum to accompany the movie, but its several pieces can also be utilized *a la carte* – feel free to use what you think will work. I’d also love to hear other ways in which you have thought to use the film to deepen thinking on these complex and – in my mind – fascinating topics! Please feel free to contact me with questions or other feedback at [info@thememphis13.com](mailto:info@thememphis13.com).

This film has been the most rewarding project of my professional life and I am hopeful that it will continue to inspire and challenge students in the years ahead.

Sincerely,

Daniel Kiel  
Director, *The Memphis 13*

# First Days

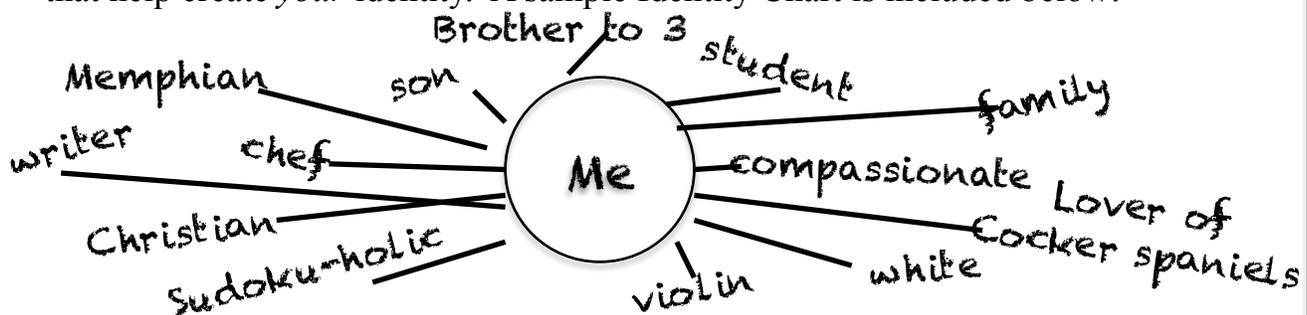
*“First grade can be a scary thing, even without the burden of making history.”*

## The Importance of Identity

Entering a new environment can be a challenge even under the best of circumstances. That challenge can be compounded when some element of our identity – for instance, our age, hometown, religion, gender, race, sexuality, or native language – marks us as different.

### Activity: The First Day of School

*What makes up your identity?* Consider all of the things that could be answer the question “Who am I?” and develop an Identity Chart<sup>1</sup> identifying the things that help create *your* identity. A sample Identity Chart is included below:



With your identity chart in mind, think back to a “first day” that you have experienced. It could be the first day in a new school or camp, the first day in a new neighborhood – any environment you were entering for the first time. As you remember that experience, consider the following questions:

- What emotions did you feel? Were you frightened? Excited? Both?
- Why do you think you felt those emotions?
- What other people impacted that experience?
- Who made it either more successful or more difficult? How?
- What other factors made your experience successful or difficult?
- How long did it take for you to feel comfortable in the new environment? Did any of the emotions of your initial experience linger?
- Were there any elements of your identity that affected your first day? Were those effects positive or negative?

**Classroom Suggestion:** After taking time to complete the activity, take 3-5 minutes to share identity charts and reflect with a partner on the questions above.

<sup>1</sup> Identity Charts have been developed by Facing History and Ourselves. For more information and instruction, see: <https://www.facinghistory.org/for-educators/educator-resources/teaching-strategies/identity-charts>

## History: Racial Segregation in American Public Education

### *From Roberts to Plessy*

In the 1840s, five-year old Sarah Roberts attempted to enroll in the public school closest to her home in Boston, Massachusetts. Unfortunately for Ms. Roberts, who was an African American, that school was designated for white students only. When her case, *Roberts v. City of Boston*, reached the highest court in Massachusetts, this practice of segregation was deemed constitutional.



“It is urged that this maintenance of separate schools tends to deepen and perpetuate the odious distinction of caste, founded in a deep-rooted prejudice in public opinion,” the Court noted. “This prejudice, if it exists, is not created by law, and probably cannot be changed by law.”

A half-century later, Homer Plessy attempted to ride in a railcar in Louisiana. Unfortunately for Mr. Plessy, who was 1/8 African American, that railcar was designated for white passengers only. When his case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, reached the United States Supreme Court in 1896, the Court cited the *Roberts* case and concluded that this practice of “separate, but equal” was also constitutional.

Following the *Plessy* decision, many states and communities constructed systems of “Jim Crow” segregation whereby strict racial separation was the rule in nearly every arena of civic life. Jim Crow laws mandated segregation in buses, parks, zoos, and even water fountains. School districts adopted segregation as well, operating with policies like that found in the charter of the Memphis City Schools, captioned below:

#### *Thought Questions*

- *If students are subject to the same rules and regulations, is that equal even if they are separated?*
- *How do you judge the equality of schools? Railcars? Water fountains?*
- *Is separation inherently unequal?*
  - *If so, why?*
  - *If not, under what circumstances might separation be equal?*

#### ARTICLE 81. CHARTER OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS\*

Sec 1000. Board to provide separate schools for white and colored pupils.

Said board of education shall provide and maintain separate schools for the use and accommodation of the white and colored youths of the city entitled to admission in the public schools of the City of Memphis, subject to all respects, to the same rules, regulations and treatment. (Priv. Acts 1868-69, ch. 30, § 14)

## History: Racial Segregation in American Public Education

## *The Campaign to End Public School Segregation*

From the outset, the *Plessy* decision and the Jim Crow laws that followed it were controversial. Dissenting from the case's outcome, Justice John Harlan predicted that *Plessy v. Ferguson* would prove "pernicious" by arousing race hate and creating and perpetuating a feeling of distrust between the races. However, given the popular support for racial segregation, the task of overcoming *Plessy* would prove a difficult one.

*"There is no caste here. Our constitution is color-blind and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens."*

- Justice Harlan's dissent in *Plessy*

Leading the challenge was African American lawyer Charles Hamilton Houston, a graduate of Harvard Law School and the dean of Howard Law School in Washington, D.C. Houston led a group of attorneys working on behalf of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) on a lengthy campaign in the courts to undo Jim Crow. Initially, Houston took steps to document inequality among the schools for white and African American students. With this evidence, lawyers were able to successfully claim that the 'equal' in 'separate but equal' was not being provided.

Following World War II, Houston's campaign intensified with a focus on colleges and graduate schools. In 1950, the Supreme Court confronted a situation in *McLaurin v. Oklahoma Board of Regents* where an African American student, G.W. McLaurin, attended the same graduate school as his white peers, but was forced to sit separately in class and elsewhere on campus. Although Mr. McLaurin had access to the same materials, curriculum, and facilities, the Court concluded in a victory for the NAACP that the restrictions were unconstitutional.



Charles Hamilton Houston passed away before the Court's decision in the *McLaurin* case, leaving the effort in the hands of proteges like Thurgood Marshall, Robert Carter, Constance Baker Motley, and Spottswood Robinson. In time, this team would seek to build on victories in cases like *McLaurin* to directly confront the practice of segregation – challenging the "separate" in "separate but equal." This shift ultimately led to *Brown v. Board of Education*, the historic decision that is excerpted on the following page.

# History: Racial Segregation in American Public Education

## *Brown v. Board of Education*

347 U.S. 581

BROWN et al.

v.

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF TOPEKA,  
SHAWNEE COUNTY < KAN, et al.

BRIGGS et al. v. ELLIOTT et al.

DAVIS et al.

v.

COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD OF PRINCE  
EDWARD COUNTY, VA., et al.

GEBHART et al. v. BELTON et al.

Nos. 1, 2, 4, 10.

Reargued Dec. 7, 8, 9, 1953.

Decided May 17, 1954.

Mr. Chief Justice WARREN delivered the opinion of the Court.

In each of the cases, minors of the Negro race, through their legal representatives, seek the aid of the courts in obtaining admission to the public schools of their community on a nonsegregated basis. Segregation was alleged to deprive the plaintiffs of the equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment. Under the so-called 'separate but equal' doctrine announced by this Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, equality of treatment is accorded when the races are provided substantially equal facilities, even though these facilities be separate. The plaintiffs contend that segregated public schools are not 'equal' and cannot be made 'equal,' and that hence they are deprived of the equal protection of the laws.

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments.

Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces.

It is the very foundation of good citizenship.

Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.

We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.

Separation of children from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone. Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to retard the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system.

We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

It is so ordered.

## History: Racial Segregation in American Public Education

### *All Deliberate Speed and Implementation of Brown*

Although the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown* declared racial segregation unconstitutional, the Court left open the question of remedy – what it would order school districts to do in order to comply with the decision. A year later, the Court issued a second decision, *Brown II*, in which it spelled out the path forward.

*“Full implementation of these constitutional principles may require solution of varied local school problems.”*

*- Brown v. Board of Educ. II (1955)*

Characterizing its 1954 decision as having declared “the fundamental principle that racial discrimination in public education is unconstitutional,” the Court ordered the districts to make a “prompt and reasonable start” toward “a racially nondiscriminatory school system.” The Court remanded the cases, or sent them back to the lower courts to oversee the districts’ compliance or lack thereof. The local courts were given the power to ensure that compliance occurred “with all deliberate speed.” Following *Brown II*, each community would have a desegregation story of its own.

### *Crisis in Little Rock*

The superintendent of schools in Little Rock, AR, proposed to begin school desegregation there by admitting African American students to the all-white Central High School. Although the local federal court approved the plan, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus mobilized the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the entrance of any black students into Central. Under Gov. Faubus’s orders, the National Guard prevented the students from entering for 17 days. Eventually, Gov. Faubus removed the National Guard, leaving the black students attempting to enter the school vulnerable to an angry mob of white opponents of desegregation. Responding to the crisis, President Dwight Eisenhower sent in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to escort the students into the school, noting that “Mob rule cannot be allowed to override the decisions of our courts.” On September 25, 1957, nine African American students – the Little Rock Nine – entered Central High School.



#### *Thought Questions*

•Do the following words mean the same thing?

•Desegregation?

•Integration?

•Non-discrimination?

•Which, if any, should have been the mandate after *Brown*?

# Not Another Little Rock

Little Rock served as an example of how desegregation could lead to a crisis within a community. As other districts set out to comply with *Brown* in the wake of the Little Rock crisis, leaders and activists had to make difficult choices about the practicalities of their action. Imagine you are in a community faced with desegregating its schools in the years shortly after the *Brown* decision and the Little Rock crisis. Now it's your turn to develop your own plan of desegregation.

## Activity: What Would You Do?

Your school district, like many others, serves a student population of between 25,000 and 75,000 students and has historically had separate schools for students of different races. Although many neighborhoods are segregated as well, neighborhoods made up of families of different races are often very close to one another.

Having seen in Little Rock that the federal government is willing to use its full resources to ensure that desegregation takes place, you know that your community must take action. The only question is what action to take...

Develop a desegregation plan, considering the following issues and explaining why your district is making the choices it is:

- How many students should participate in the initial desegregation? A few? Several thousand?
- What grade(s) should those students be in? A single grade? All grades?
- How many schools would participate in the initial desegregation? Where would participating schools be located?
- Should African American students attend formerly all-white schools or vice versa? Or both?
- What would you consider to be a "successful" desegregation?
- What groups or individuals might be crucial to making your district's effort successful?

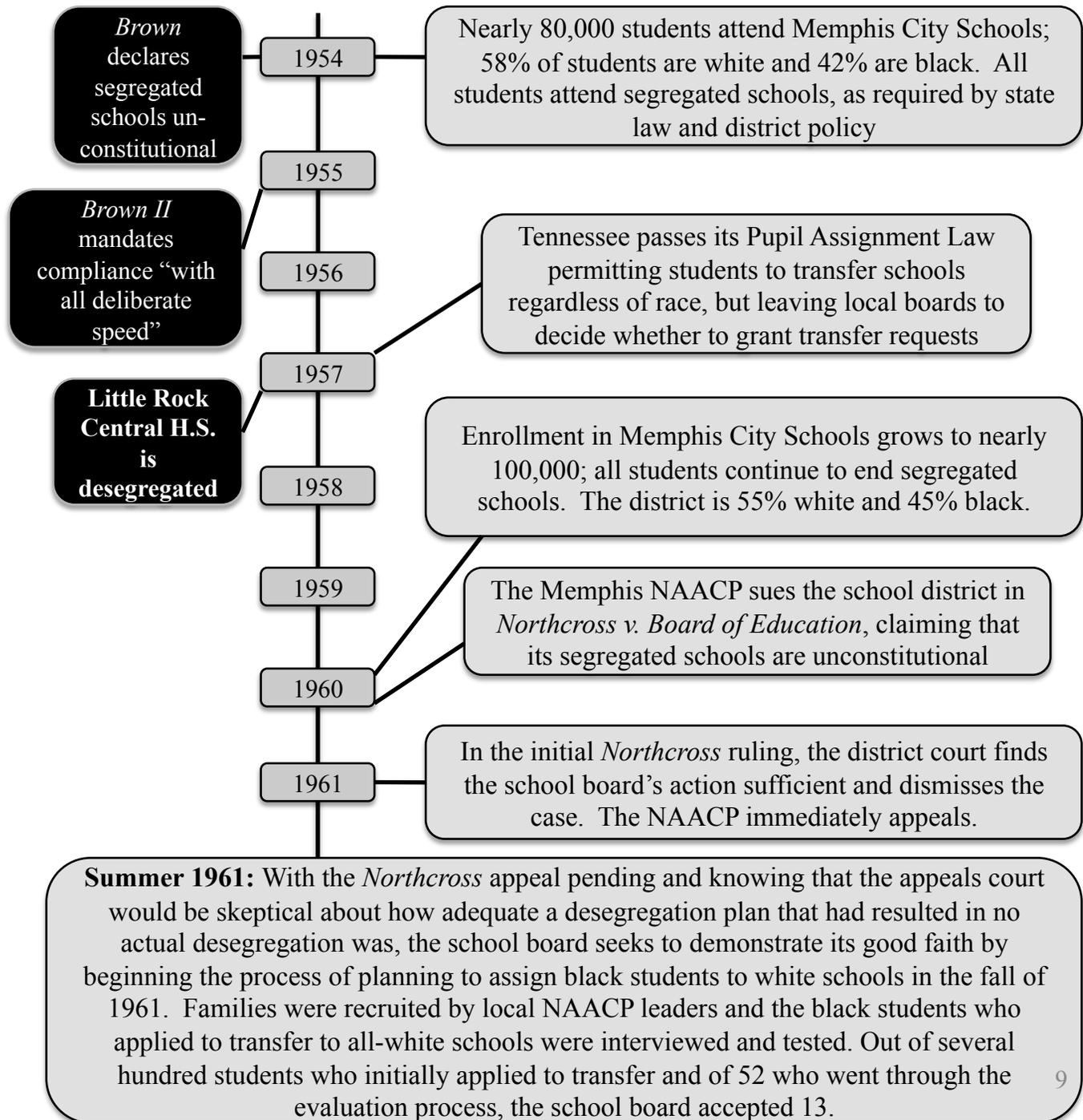
**Classroom Suggestion:** Break students into groups to consider these questions as though they are separate school districts. Alternatively, assign groups different perspectives from which to consider these issues, such as: leader of the local NAACP, member of the local school board, parent of a white student, parent of an African American student, white community leader (such as a clergy figure or member of the chamber of commerce), or other member of the community. After each group considers how to implement a "successful" school desegregation, regroup the full class. Consider how the motivations and interests of these groups differed and how things have changed since 1957.

# History: Racial Segregation in American Public Education

## School Desegregation in Memphis City Schools

*“This will take time, much time... There will be no place for bitterness and rancor, balking and stubbornness if the job is to be done right.”*

- Editorial in (Memphis) *Tri-State Defender* following *Brown* decision



## *Bruce Elem.*

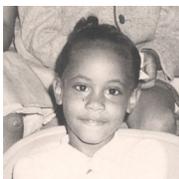
### Harry Williams

Previous School:  
Carnes Elementary



### Dwania Kyles

Previous School:  
Cummings Elementary



### Michael Willis

Previous School:  
LaRose Elementary



Now: Menelik Fombi

## *Gordon Elem.*

### Sheila Malone

Previous School:  
Klondike Elementary

Now: Sheila Conway



### Sharon Malone

Previous School:  
Klondike Elementary



### Alvin Freeman

Previous School:  
Klondike Elementary



### Pamela Mayes

Previous School:  
Klondike Elementary

Now: Pamela Evans



## *Meet The Memphis 13*

## *Rozelle Elem.*

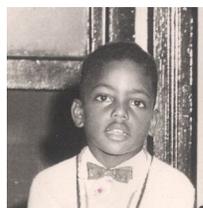
### Clarence Williams

Previous School:  
Cummings Elementary



### Leandrew Wiggins

Previous School:  
Lincoln Elementary



### E.C. Freeman

Previous School:  
Cummings Elementary  
E.C. Fentress (dec. 2010)



### Joyce Bell

Previous School:  
Walker Elementary  
Now: Joyce White



## *Springdale Elem.*

### Jacqueline Moore

Previous School:  
Hyde Park Elementary  
Now: Jacqueline Christian



### Deborah Ann Holt

Previous School:  
Hyde Park Elementary  
Now: Deborah Payne



**Guiding Question:**

**How do the choices of individual actors impact historical narratives?**

The principal characters in the events of October 3, 1961, were the 13 African American students who entered all-white schools. However, the experiences of the Memphis 13 were impacted by choices of actors as far away as Washington and as close to home as their parents. Some of these actors and their choices are identified below. Consider these **choices**, including the **motivations** of the actors, the **options** the actors had (or didn't have), and the **consequences** of various choices.

**Actor: Black Parent**

Choice: Should I apply to enroll my young child into an all-white school? If my child is selected, should I allow him or her to attend?

**Actor: Local Media**

Choice: What tone should I take in reporting this story? Should I seek out stories of conflict or stories of order?

**Actor: Memphis Police Dep't** <sup>11</sup>

Choice: What role should my personal opinions play in performing my role ensuring law and order?

**Actor: White Student**

Choice: How should I treat the newly-arrived African American students in my class?

**Actor: Memphis NAACP Leaders**

Choice: How much should I cooperate with white leaders to ensure a smooth process? What preparations should I make to support the children?

**Actor: Teacher**

Choice: How, if at all, should I acknowledge the presence of students of different races in my classroom? What is my responsibility to ease these students' experiences?

**Actor: Black Friends**

Choice: How should I treat my friend now that she is attending a different school with white students?

**Actor: White Leadership**

Choice: How active or aggressive should I be in advocating (either resistance to desegregation or compliance and order)?

**Classroom Suggestion:** Have students create Identity Charts (see p. 3) for the students of the Memphis 13 and for the actors described above. Consider how the personal identities of these individuals impacted the choices they made. Connect such impacts to the Activity on page 12.

# Choosing to Bystand, Perpetrate or Upstand

“95 – 98% of the kids was good to me. The other 2%...I just thought they was bad kids.” -Alvin Freeman, Gordon Elem.

The Memphis 13 have very different memories of interactions with their white peers. The choices these white children made had an enormous impact on how comfortable – or uncomfortable – the black students felt in their new schools. In the memories of the Memphis 13 are stories about classmates who were **perpetrators**, individuals who actively set out to make the experience a difficult one. Menelik Fombi remembered being targeted in games of dodgeball, while Harry Williams recalled that some students discouraged others who had initially befriended him.

In addition, several of the Memphis 13 recall classmates who were **upstanders**, individuals who actively stood up for equity, even at potential personal risk. Pamela Mayes Evans fondly remembers her friends Helen and Chris who made her feel less isolated.

The students do not speak about the largest group of students though. These are the **bystanders**, who did not harass the students, but who did not stand up to make life easier either.

What are the consequences of bystanding in a situation like that experienced by the Memphis 13?

## Activity: Choices

What must it have been like to have had to make the choices made by the many actors that impacted the experiences of the Memphis 13? Using the chart below, consider the many different things that might have gone into such decisions. Add a new row for each choice. Share your thoughts with other viewers.

**Actor:** Who is making the choice?

**Choice:** What is the choice they must make?

**Options:** What are the actors various options for action (or inaction)?

**Interests:** What might the actor be taking into consideration? These may conflict with one another.

**Consequences:** What might the short-term and long-term consequences be of each option for action?

Actor	Choice	Options	Interests	Consequences
Black Parents	Apply to Send Child to all-White School			

**Guiding Question:**

**What is the proper role of children in social movements?**

When pondering the wisdom of beginning with first graders for desegregation, Menelik Fombi commented, “There’s never a perfect time to walk through fire.” For Fombi and the rest of the Memphis 13, their experience walking through fire came at a very early age – 5- or 6-years old. The use of children – very young children – in Memphis and in other events during the Civil Rights Movement was part of a deliberate strategy that had potential benefits as well as risks. Although it was parents who signed up, it was the children who ultimately had to experience whatever desegregation would bring. As Sharon Malone said, “Once those doors closed and our parents left, **it was us.**”

**Activity: Gallery Walk**

Some of the most effective conversations are the ones in which no words are spoken. In this activity, participants are invited to silently “discuss” elements of the film. Set up pieces of large paper or posterboard around the room and write the following statements or questions on them – or select some of your own. With pen in hand, participants will silently walk around the “gallery” and write their responses, feelings, or questions triggered by the content at each prompt. As responses are added, participants can engage in silent conversations, responding not only to the prompts but to the thoughts of their peers. After allowing some time for this, small groups should form at each prompt and discuss the content of the responses before sharing with the larger group.

-“Where are all the kids who look like me?” -First Grader Pioneers

-“You were kind of always alone.”

-“Everyone around was like a giant towering over us.”

-“Being a kid, you don’t have a choice.”

**Classroom Suggestion:** In facilitating a discussion on these topics, ask students to consider the risks and benefits of using first graders and connect these to stories from the film. Have students role play a conversation about desegregation with a five-year-old: Does it matter whether the students understood what they were a part of? How would first graders express the complex emotions the Memphis 13 express in the film? What barriers would have made discussing such feelings difficult?

# Parents & Children

Central to the students' walk through fire was the relationship between the students and their parents. Consider the following parent-child exchanges:

## Child

"Recently I asked my dad, I said 'I thought maybe you and mom were mad at me. I mean, why did I have to go to that school?'"

- Dwania Kyles

## Parent

"In my later years, I did feel a little guilty putting a 5-year-old through that. But it was something that had to be done...so we did it."

- Rev. Billy Kyles

- *Why do you think Rev. Kyles feels guilty as he thinks back on his daughter's participation in school desegregation?*
- *Do you think he would make the same decision again?*
  - *Why or why not?*

## ~ Thought Questions ~

- *Why did Harry Williams and his mother have such different perspectives on Harry's experience?*
- *What might have kept Harry from expressing fear to his mother?*
- *What might have led Mrs. Morris to will herself to believe that Harry was comfortable in his experience?*



## Parent

"He knew what to expect, so he wasn't scared."

-Romanita Morris  
(Harry Williams's mother)

## Child

"I was scared..."

- Harry Williams

**Guiding Question:**

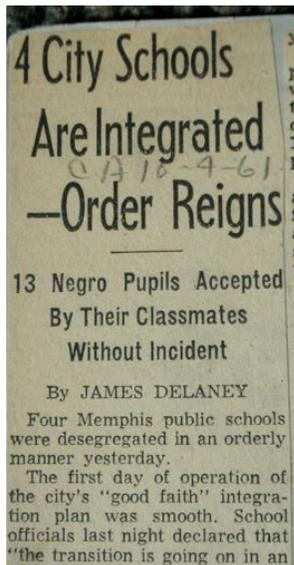
**How do we capture history that is complicated and experienced individually?**

The desegregation of the Memphis City Schools is a single mark on a community timeline. However, that single mark does not reflect the complexity of the historic moment. Reducing school desegregation or any other historical event to a timeline milestone ignores that individuals who lived through it experienced it individually and carry unique memories. For example, compare how two students recalled something that has always been important to first graders, ice cream:

“My new school, they had ice cream. That right there was almost enough to make me glad I was at that school.”  
- Alvin Freeman

“They could have had ice cream all day, but there wasn’t enough ice cream in the world to make me want to go back to that school.”  
- Clarence Williams

History can be told through newspaper articles and legal cases, through the speeches of leaders or through other parts of the official record. But history can also be told through the stories of those on the ground, through the subjective memories of participants. The story of the Memphis 13 exists in all of these places. The **official** story tells of the impact on the community, while the **unofficial** story looks more closely at individuals. Consider the newspaper headlines and corresponding questions below:



*Thought Questions*

- Does the newspaper headline reflect the way the event unfolded for the students over time?
- What is the value of studying the unofficial story?
- Do the differences between the two versions make either untrue?
- Is history that includes only one or the other complete?

## Defining Success

When Harry Williams looked back upon his experience in first grade, he recognized that being a trailblazer had served him well when he later served as the only African American on his command in the U.S. Navy. In contrast, Clarence Williams recalled a very different lesson.

“I learned how to shut out those negative obstacles and focus on the positive side.”

- Harry Williams

“I knew where to get on at and where to get off at. I knew I was not equal.”

- Clarence Williams

**Classroom Suggestion:** At the time of the Memphis school desegregation, President John F. Kennedy complimented Memphis on its orderly school desegregation, stating that Memphis “reflected credit on the United States throughout the world. Would the students who experienced the event agree with the President’s assessment? Challenge students to define success, paying attention to whether success should be defined at the community or the individual level.

### Activity: Oral Histories

The stories of the 13 students existed only in the students’ minds for decades as they grew into adults. There are similarly hidden stories all around us. All that is needed to unlock them is a curious questioner who is willing to listen. The consequence of not asking people to tell their stories is that the stories are lost forever. Without these unofficial, first-person accounts, our understanding of history is not complete.

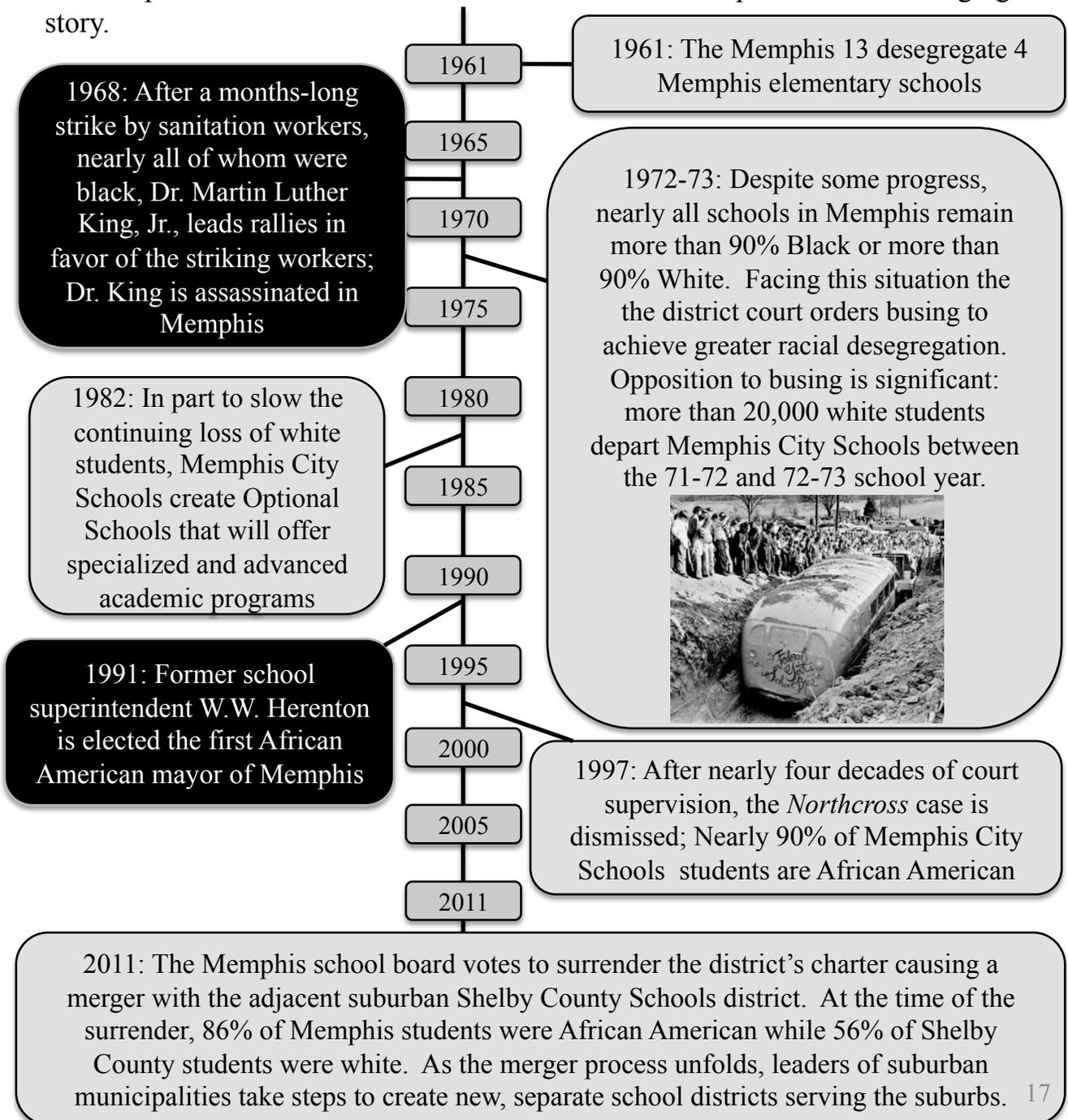
Anyone can be an oral historian and unlock stories that are interesting to them. Become an oral historian yourself:

- Select a person that is interesting to you, such as a family member or a member of your local community.
- After doing preliminary research, prepare a series of questions on a topic you’d like to know more about, such as the subject’s childhood or a specific event in their life. The questions should be open-ended (not answerable with a ‘yes’ or ‘no.’) and should start out general. **Be prepared to follow up** with unscripted questions responding to what you hear.
- The most important thing is to develop **trust** with the subject. Trust between an oral historian and her subject is the most important ingredient.
- Record the interview. Listen or watch it back, and use the subject’s words to develop a narrative. Write the story or, if you are able, edit a video to make a short documentary that will ensure the story is never lost.
- Share your work with your subject!

# History: Desegregation in Memphis City Schools

*From Then  
Until Now*

The decades that followed the desegregation of Memphis City Schools in 1961 brought many more difficult moments in the quest to achieve the promise of the *Brown* decision. As with the initial breaking of the color line, the story is complex and was influenced by many different actors and decisions. Listed below are some of most important moments of the official version of Memphis's school desegregation story.



Facilitators tasked with leading a discussion about *The Memphis 13* can make use of the Thought Questions throughout this guide. Included below are additional questions about both topics raised by the film that can further aid facilitators in steering participants through a meaningful conversation.

### *Thought Questions Emerging from the Film*

- If you could ask one of the Memphis 13 a question, what would you ask? Why?
- Choose a statement from the film that resonates with you. What did the speaker say? How and why does it resonate with you?
- What surprised you most about the story of the Memphis 13?
- Would you volunteer yourself or your own child to participate in an event like school desegregation? Why or why not?
- What would you have changed about the way schools were desegregated in Memphis in 1961? Why?
- Although students no longer have to blaze the same paths that the Memphis 13 did, many students today are blazing new paths of their own as the "first" or "only" student on that path. What are some examples of contemporary situations that are similar to what the Memphis 13 went through? How are today's situations similar and different?

### *Thought Questions About School Desegregation*

- Given continued racial segregation in public schools, was the work of the Memphis 13 worth it?
- Although state-mandated racial segregation in schools no longer exists, many schools remain segregated. Is this "de facto segregation" a problem? Why or why not?
- The Brown story involves pursuit of both racial justice and educational opportunity. Which should be the higher priority – school integration or school quality?
- Should a student's race be considered at all in making decisions about what school he is assigned to or whether he is admitted to a university? What about a student's gender? Socioeconomic status? Native language? Disability? Zip code?
- In a democracy, what is the purpose of a system of public education?
- What might have been the long-term outcome had NAACP lawyers continued to challenge inequality as opposed to separation?

Check [www.thememphis13.com](http://www.thememphis13.com) for additional resources, including information about inviting members of the Memphis 13 or the film's director to join you to discuss this overlooked story of the Civil Rights Movement.