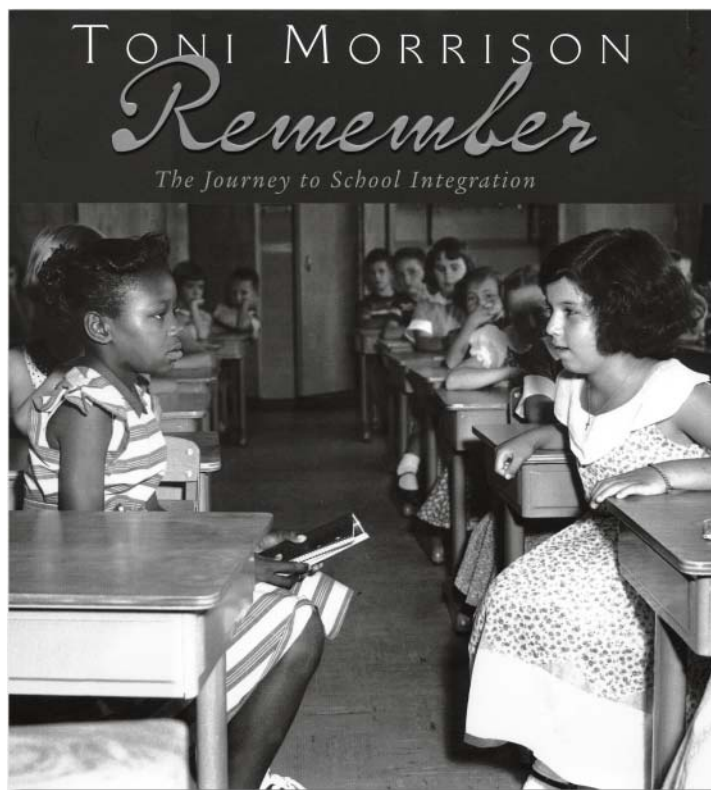


Remember

The Journey to School Integration

by Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison is a master storyteller. Her groundbreaking novel *Beloved* won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize in fiction. In 1993 she became the first black woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in Literature. Toni Morrison is currently the Robert F. Goheen Professor of Humanities at Princeton University. *Remember* is her first historical work for young people.



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Introduction

Part history, part current events, and part imagination, Toni Morrison's look at school desegregation in the 1950s and the civil rights movement that followed is all about people: those who put themselves on the line to correct unfairness, to challenge accepted values, and to change the way things were, as well as all of us who benefit from those changes today. The photographs and spare text invite us to put ourselves into this era of change and understand how it felt. They challenge us to ask ourselves how it still feels. And they remind us to remember.

Remember: The Journey to School Integration introduces a period of recent American history to upper elementary and middle school students, and this guide provides you with ideas for exploring the period through discussion, research, "trial experiences," examination of primary source material, and written and oral projects. *Remember* is also a wonderful way to introduce your class to the work of a Nobel prize-winning writer.

In the Classroom

1. In her introduction to *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*, Toni Morrison tells us: "I have imagined the thoughts and feelings of some of the people in the photographs chosen to help tell the story." In some of the photographs, it is clear whose thoughts are depicted. But in others, Ms. Morrison has left it for the reader to decide. Discuss with the class the photograph on page 22:

- Which girl is the thinker?
- Why does she feel that way?
- What might the other child be thinking?

Have your students reverse the thoughts of the children in the picture and discuss it from the other point of view. Remind your students that this picture was taken in 1954 just a few months after the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

This exercise can also be done for other scenes depicted in the book. See pages 42, 43, and 70.

Divide the class into three groups. Assign each group one of the photographs listed above. Have the groups write an imagined dialogue between the girls in the pictures. Have the groups perform the dialogue for the class.



Bettmann/CORBIS



can Missionary Association Archives Addendum, Trinity Schools, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana



Bettmann/CORBIS

2. Toni Morrison tells us on page 7 that before 1954, in many places in the United States, school districts could legally segregate students into different schools according to the color of their skin, providing that the separate schools were equal. She also advises us that many schools for children of color were inferior to the schools for white children.

Look at the photos on pages 14 and 15, which depict segregated schools in Alabama and Georgia in the 1940s. Ms. Morrison gives voice to one of the students: "I bet I could be good at learning . . . if I had a real desk and lots of books and things." Have your students discuss the following questions:

- Would "separate but equal" have been acceptable if the school facilities in segregated schools really were physically equal?
- Besides the obvious, what was inherently missing in segregated schools?
- Can separate ever be equal?

Try an experiment. With the help of other teachers, the school administration, and the consent of the parents, divide the class based on their last names, A–L in one group and M–Z in the other (the groups do not have to be of equal size).

Set one room up with sufficient books, furniture, and supplies for each student in the group, and set the other up with chairs but no tables and few books and supplies. Explain to the students that their morning lessons will be conducted in separate rooms in the school. After lunch, bring the two groups together to discuss the experience.

Lead the discussion with questions that include

- How did they feel about their classroom surroundings?
- Was the situation conducive to learning?
- How did they feel about being arbitrarily separated from their friends and classmates?
- What was missing from their learning experience?
- Can separate ever be equal?

As a follow-up activity, have the class write about the experience as if it were being reported in the newspaper or as a television news report.

3. Page 17 shows a picture of Linda Brown and her younger sister en route to a segregated school rather than to a neighborhood school in Topeka, Kansas, in January 1954. Linda Brown's father challenged the law that segregated his children into an all-black school, and his case, along with suits from several other states, went to the U.S. Supreme Court. On May 17, 1954, the Court unanimously held in the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, that state-sanctioned segregation of public schools was a violation of the 14th Amendment and was therefore unconstitutional.

Engage your students in a research project on *Brown v. Board of Education*. Start with a copy of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which can be downloaded from a variety of sources including the National Park Service: www.nps.gov/malu/documents/amend14.html.

Focus on paragraph one, which guarantees equal protection of the laws to all citizens. Have the class discuss when the 14th Amendment was added to the Constitution and why it was needed. Discuss the role it played in *Brown v. Board of Education* and in the civil rights movement.

Brown v. Board of Education is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2004. You can download excerpts, related documents, background information, and biographies of the people involved from the Public Broadcasting System Web site: www.pbs.org/jefferson/enlight/brown.htm, the National Archives: http://archives.gov/digital_classroom (go to "teaching with documents"). You can download the full Supreme Court decision from the National Center for Public Policy Research: www.nationalcenter.org/brown.html.

Questions for research:

- Who was Linda Brown and why did she have to go to a segregated school?
- What was meant by “separate but equal”?
- What roles did Earl Warren and Thurgood Marshall play?
- Why did the Court issue another ruling in 1955 known as *Brown II*?
- What are the key words from *Brown II*?
- How did the decision affect the civil rights movement?
- In doing their research, did your students find other Supreme Court decisions that were relevant to the journey to integration?

Page 21 shows the members of the Supreme Court who ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Have your students find out more about each of the justices. Information the students can gather might include

- The part of the country he was from
- The president who appointed him
- If the justice was considered a liberal or a conservative

When the students have completed their research, ask them to answer the following questions in their reports.

- What did they know about the fight for school integration before they read *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*?
- What was the most surprising thing they learned?
- What was the most interesting thing they learned?
- Which was the most useful resource?
- If they could ask Linda Brown any question, what would it be?

Other resources that might be useful are Brown v. Board of Education Foundation: <http://brownvboard.org>, Brown Foundation Quarterly: <http://brownvboard.org/brwnqurt/05-3/05-3b.htm>.

4. How was *Brown v. Board of Education* reported in your local newspapers and in newspapers across the country? Have your students search the archives of your local newspaper in the public library or do research at the newspaper’s own archives.

Then have them go to the Web site <http://www.landmarkcases.org/brown/reaction.html> and read excerpts from articles in newspapers around the country published on May 18, 1954, the day after the Supreme Court ruling. Items for discussion:

- Compare and contrast different regions’ newspapers’ reportage.
- How did their local newspaper report the decision?

Have your students write letters to the editor of your town’s paper as if they were in school in 1954. The letters should express their opinions and their predictions about how the ruling would affect their own school.

5. As a class project, map out cities where African Americans were forced to go to segregated schools based on the photos and photo notes on pages 74–78. Was segregation confined to the South or was it spread across the country? Discuss with the class whether they were surprised that there were segregated schools in the North and the West as well as in the South.

6. Look at the set of pictures on pages 38–40. They depict the thoughts and feelings of Elizabeth Eckford as she attempts to integrate Central High School of Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. Ms. Eckford was one of nine students chosen to integrate Central High School. They have since become known as the “Little Rock Nine.” Have your students research the events that led up to the integration of Central High. Questions to consider:

- Why do you suppose these nine students were chosen to be the first blacks to integrate the Little Rock school?
- How were they received by white students in school?
- How were they treated by outsiders (parents, authorities, the press)?



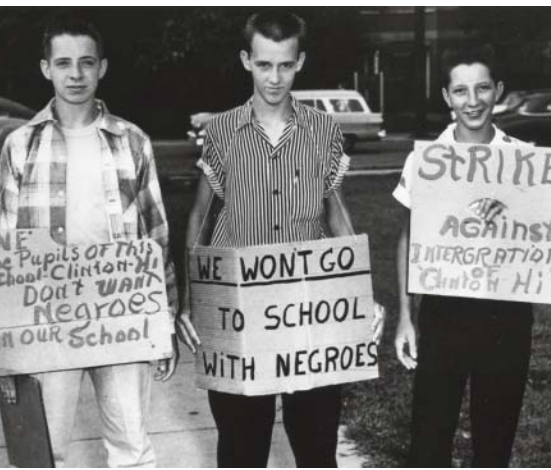
Hulton Archive/Getty Images



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AP/Wide World Photos



AP/Wide World Photos



AP/Wide World Photos

- What role did Governor Orval Faubus play? President Dwight Eisenhower? The Arkansas National Guard? The U.S. Army?
- Who were the eight other students known as the Little Rock Nine and what has integrating Central High meant to them?
- What are they doing now?

Sources your students can use are the Web site of Central High School: www.Centralhigh57.org/The_Little_Rock_Nine.html#LR9; web research project by Lisa Cozzens: www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/school-integration/lilrock/index.html; the National Park Service: www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/ak1.htm; the U.S. Department of State: <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/blackhis/nine.htm>; Corbis Picture Archives: <http://pro.corbis.com/search/searchFrame.asp> (type *Education and Integration* in the search box for the picture gallery on school integration). Video: *Journey to Little Rock, The Untold Story of Minnijean Brown Trickey*. 52 minutes, Copyright 2000 Journey to Little Rock Productions, Inc., directed by Rob Thompson, executive producers, Maria Yongmee Shin and Malcolm Guy.

7. Conduct an oral history project to find out what it was like to go to school in your town during the 1950s and 1960s. Have your students interview grandparents, teachers, school administrators, and community leaders to learn what the schools were like in that period. Brainstorm with your class the questions they would ask. Be sure to include the following:

- Were the schools segregated?
- Was segregation de jure (by law) or de facto (in fact)? Make sure the students understand that even if schools were not legally segregated (de jure), they could have been segregated in fact (de facto) because people of color were excluded from moving into certain neighborhoods and communities, and the segregated communities created segregated schools.
- How and when did the schools become integrated?

When the interviews are complete and the students have shared their findings with their classmates, you might publish all the interviews in a single volume that you donate to the school library.

8. Look at the photographs on pages 28, 35–36, and 61. Talk about personal courage:

- What would it have taken for the white boy who is speaking on page 28 NOT to carry a sign protesting blacks attending his school?
- How were the young black teens able to walk through a hostile crowd to enter school?
- What does the young activist on page 61 mean when he says “I’m scared but not afraid”?
- Have you ever been in a position where you had to choose between what “everyone” was doing, what “everyone” expected, and what you thought was right? What did you choose to do? Why? What were the consequences of your choice?
- What is your definition of courage? Who are the most courageous people you can name? (Include historical and contemporary people.) What qualities do they all share?