



**FACING  
HISTORY &  
OURSELVES**

**CLASSROOM VIDEO • VIEWING GUIDE**

# TEACHING ABOUT SEGREGATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES: *EXAMINING PLESSY V. FERGUSON*

## Overview

In this classroom video, social studies teacher Jenna Forton teaches a lesson from the Choices in Little Rock unit. In this lesson, Ms. Forton first asks students to respond to the following prompt in their journals: What does equality mean to you? Does it mean equal treatment under the law, equal opportunities, equal education, or something else? The video begins after Ms. Forton has distributed the reproducible What the Court Decided, which contains the court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Students read both the majority view and the dissenting

opinion in pairs or small groups, with instructions from Ms. Forton to read and annotate the decision for evidence to answer the following questions:

- How does the majority opinion explain its ruling in the case? What justification does the majority provide for maintaining segregation?
- How does Justice John Marshall Harlan view the ruling? What does he define as the purpose of segregation?

- What does Justice Harlan mean when he says that the Constitution is “color-blind”?

The video concludes with students discussing the questions in small groups (and later as a whole class, using the Fishbowl teaching strategy).

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## Questions to Consider

1. At **4:24**, a student notes, “The last question, it says, ‘Should the Constitution be color-blind?’ No! You need to be able to be open and see a different lens and different people’s perspectives . . . You should be able to be opened up to different people’s experiences and have some kind of empathy.” Is this student interpreting the “color-blind” idea as you would, or as Harlan intended? How might the concept of color-blindness affect one’s openness to different perspectives, as well as empathy?
  2. What evidence do you see of students using the text to support their claims? How does Ms. Forton encourage this practice?
  3. At **7:23**, Ms. Forton reflects: “It’s important for kids to see how [our governmental] structures impact the function of our country, and of their lived experiences.” How do you think making these connections supports student agency?
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## Featured

**Jenna Forton**  
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8th Grade  
Ravenswood  
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## Video Goals

- **See** the lesson on *Plessy v. Ferguson* from the Choices in Little Rock unit in action.
- **Consider** how you might teach this lesson in your own classroom.
- **Determine** what adjustments you might need to make to the lesson based on your students’ needs.

## Lesson Resources

- [Choices in Little Rock](#) (pages 35–36)