

# SNAPSHOTS OF SCHOOL SEGREGATION

**Grades 1-3**

**Lesson Length: 3-5 days**

Discuss the word **segregation** with students. Have they heard it before? What does it mean? If students have some familiarity with the term, create a concept map or web to record their prior knowledge. Then use the following descriptions, images, and accompanying questions to discuss the history of school segregation in the United States, starting with a snapshot of Ruby Bridges and then moving back in time to Sylvia Mendez and Mamie Tape. Students can read individually, in pairs, or the teacher can read the snapshots aloud.

After reading the snapshots, students should compare and contrast the experiences of each girl, orally or on a worksheet like those attached. Consider the following questions:

- What obstacle did each child and her family face?
- How did the families fight for what was fair?
- How did the schools Sylvia and Ruby were assigned to differ from the schools their parents want them to be enrolled in?
- How did other people/groups react when each girl tried to attend the schools normally used by White students?

Older students may want to learn more about the role of the law in maintaining and eventually ending segregation in schools. This lesson lends itself to discussion about six major pieces of legislation related to school segregation and the individuals described in the packet. The selective timeline that follows may help students understand these examples of injustice over time. It is important to remember that the United States' long history of segregation includes far more court cases and events than are listed here. The National Archives are a great resource for more info as is [www.educational-law.org](http://www.educational-law.org).

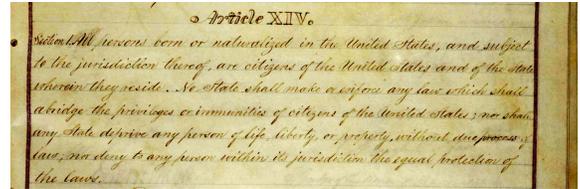
This lesson may be used in conjunction with a larger unit about civil rights or citizenship as well as to demonstrate character traits and cause and effect.

# TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS\*

## RELATED TO SCHOOL SEGREGATION

### 1868 *14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*

The fourteenth amendment granted citizenship “to all persons born or naturalized in the United States,” including slaves recently freed after the Civil War. It also forbid states from denying “life, liberty or property, without due process of law” or to deny any person equal protection under the law.



### 1885 *Tape v. Hurley*

The California Supreme Court decided that denying a child entrance to public schools was a violation of state law and the Constitution. However, districts could create schools that separated children by race/ethnicity.

### 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson*

The U.S. Supreme Court decided that state laws requiring racial segregation in public facilities were constitutional as long as the facilities were “separate but equal.” Often facilities were far from equal, reducing many non-whites to the status of second-class citizens.

### 1927 *Gong Lum v. Rice*

The U.S. Supreme Court decided that Chinese were defined as “colored” and therefore maintained segregation of Chinese from white schools.

### 1946 *Mendez v. Westminster*

The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled unconstitutional the separation of Mexican and Mexican American students into “Mexican schools.”

### 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education*

The U.S. Supreme Court declared unconstitutional laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students, stating that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” *Brown v. Board* is considered a landmark in public education history, but was contested by some members of the public and government officials at the time. There was no timeframe for desegregation, so the desegregation process differed greatly between states.



# RUBY BRIDGES

When Ruby Bridges was a kindergartener in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1959, she attended a segregated, all-Black elementary school several miles from her home. An all-White school was located much closer, only five blocks away, but the only African-American students who were allowed to attend it had to pass a special test. Ruby took the test and was one of only six students to pass it. This allowed her to attend the nearby William Frantz School, and made her the first Black child to attend an all-white elementary school in the South.



However, some people did not want Ruby to attend the Frantz School and fought to keep her out of the school. On November 14, 1960, four U.S. marshals drove Ruby and her mother to her new school so that she would be protected when she walked in. When they arrived at the school, large crowds of people were in front, yelling and throwing objects. After Ruby walked in, she was taken to the principal's office where she spent the entire day. Since nearly all the White parents had kept their children at home, there were no classes that day. One teacher, Mrs. Henry, agreed to teach Ruby. Ruby was the only student in Mrs. Henry's class for a full year, because other parents pulled their children out of Mrs. Henry's class or threatened to withdraw them from the school. Ruby spent the entire day in Mrs. Henry's classroom, unable to be with other students in the cafeteria or outside at recess. When she had to go to the bathroom, the U.S. marshals walked her down the hall. Ruby's first year at Frantz School was not easy.

The next school year was better, but there were many changes. The protestors were gone, Mrs. Henry moved away, the U.S. marshals were gone, and Ruby walked to school by herself. There were 20 other students in her second grade class and other African-American children now attended Frantz School. Eventually Ruby graduated from high school, began a career, got married, and had a family. Many years later, a children's book about her experience at Frantz School was published by her first grade counselor and she reunited with Mrs. Henry and U.S. marshal Charles Burks.

## LEARN MORE ABOUT RUBY BRIDGES

- VIDEO: [Ruby Bridges Goes to School](#), from *Rise!* Episode Five of the PBS series, *The African-Americans: Many Rivers to Cross with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.* (PBS)
- [The Education of Ruby Nell](#) (in Ruby's own words)
- [Ruby Bridges Foundation](http://www.rubybridgesfoundation.org), <http://www.rubybridgesfoundation.org>
- VIDEO: [Ruby's reunion with Charles Burks](#) (USA Today)
- VIDEO: [Ruby Bridges interview with Scholastic kid reporter](#) (YouTube)
- FILM: [Disney's Ruby Bridges](#)
- BOOK: [The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Cole](#)
- BOOK: [Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story by Ruby Bridges](#)

# SYLVIA MENDEZ

Sylvia Mendez' family moved to a farm in Westminster, California when she was in third grade. Her aunt went to register her own daughters, Sylvia, and Sylvia's brothers at the nearby Westminster School. Sylvia's light-skinned cousins were allowed to register at Westminster, but her aunt was told that Sylvia and her dark-skinned brothers must attend the Hoover School instead. Hoover was a segregated school for Mexican children, where students learned how to sew and clean instead of learning academics like math and reading. Westminster School had new textbooks and a beautiful playground; Hoover School looked like a shack, had old, tattered books, and was surrounded by an electric fence.



When Sylvia's father questioned why his daughter and sons were placed at Hoover, the only answer he received was, "That is how it is done." He met with the head of Westminster School, the county superintendent, and the Orange County School Board, and everyone told him the same thing. Mr. Mendez began talking to other Mexican and Mexican American parents and learned that their children were also denied access to better schools and were told to go to the Mexican school instead. He eventually filed a group lawsuit against Westminster School District along with four other Mexican fathers. They claimed that their children along with 5,000 others were unjustly placed in inferior "Mexican schools" and were the victims of discrimination. Sylvia's father won their lawsuit, which ended school segregation in California.

After working as a nurse for 33 years, Sylvia retired and dedicated her time to educating students about her father's court case. In 2011, she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

## LEARN MORE ABOUT SYLVIA MENDEZ

- [Sylvia Mendez's website](http://sylviamendezinthemendezvswestminster.com), <http://sylviamendezinthemendezvswestminster.com>
- Info about the *Mendez v. Westminster* case from Law-Related Education by the State Bar of Texas
- VIDEO: [Mendez v. Westminster: Desegregating California's Schools](#) by PBS Learning Media
- VIDEO: [Voices of History by Education Week](#) (YouTube)
- BOOK: [Separate is Never Equal by Duncan Tonatiuh](#)
- BOOK: [Sylvia & Aki by Winifred Conkling](#)

# MARTHA LUM

Nine-year-old Martha Lum was enrolled at her local elementary school in Rosedale, Mississippi in 1924 and attended class on the first day. At the noon recess, the school superintendent told her that she could not return to school because she was not White. Martha's parents were Chinese, but she was born in the United States. Her father, Gong Lum, filed a lawsuit against the school board arguing that his family was not "colored"



(understood at the time to mean African American) so his daughter should be allowed to attend the White school.

The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, which decided that Martha could not be classified as White and therefore could only attend a "colored" public school or private school. This case continued the legal tradition of the court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which decided that students could be required to attend schools segregated by race as long as the facilities were "separate but equal." It extended the separate of Black and White students to Chinese children as well.

## LEARN MORE ABOUT MARTHA LUM

- [Gong Lum v. Rice at Education Law](#)
- [Gong Lum v. Rice](#) by PBS Learning Media
- VIDEO: [Gong Lum v. Rice](#) by Justajae: A Racial Project



# MAMIE TAPE

When Mamie Tape was eight years old, her parents tried to enroll her in Spring Valley School but the principal refused. She said that Chinese students were not allowed in the public schools of San Francisco, California. Although Mamie was born in the U.S., her father was an immigrant from China. Mamie's parents took the principal

to court, and in January 1885 the California Supreme Court decided that Mamie should be able to attend public school.

However, San Francisco passed a special rule to avoid integrating its public schools - it said that separate schools for Asian children should be created, and once they were available, Asian children would not be allowed to attend other schools. Although the Tape family won their case, their children were still not allowed to attend Spring Valley. In April 1885, Mamie and her brother became the first students of San Francisco's Chinese Primary School.

*Image of Joseph, Emily, Mamie, Frank & Mary Tape circa 1884-85. Courtesy of Jack Kim & Loni Ding.*

## LEARN MORE ABOUT MAMIE TAPE

- [Tape v. Hurley](#) by the National Women's History Museum
- [I Want to Go to School: The Case of Tape v. Hurley Curriculum Guide](#) by the Chinese Historical Society of America
- [Detailed history of the Tape family](#) from the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association
- VIDEO: [Interview with Alisa Kim](#), niece of Mamie Tape, by the Fred T. Korematsu Institute
- VIDEO: [Mamie Tape & the Fight for Equality in Education](#)
- Information about [the Tape v. Hurley court case](#)