

Lesson 19: Schools

“Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child and one teacher can change the world.” —Malala Yousafzai

Social Justice Standard: Justice 12

Summary

In many ways, our educational system both reflects and perpetuates our nation’s struggles with racial equity. Because the interplay between education and equity is so complex, and because schooling choices are so deeply resonant and personal for caregivers, we debated (a lot) about how to address this topic in our curriculum. It’s impossibly large and complicated, and yet, the topic is too important to be ignored. So with the awareness of the size of the tangle, we are choosing to illuminate one particular thread: the costs of racism for us all, and particularly, how segregation intersects with that.

The recommended books below will help you dive deeper into the history of “separate but equal,” the transformations integration has undergone from past to present, and the costs of segregation to children now and in the future. In doing so, we hope to avoid a common stuck point in this conversation where individuals feel bad about or obligated to defend their schooling choices. Begin your conversations using the guidelines below.

Booklist

- *Separate Is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh
- *Busing Brewster* by Richard Michelson, illustrated by R. G. Roth
- *As Fast as Words Could Fly* by Pamela Tuck and Eric Velasquez
- *Tomatoes in My Lunchbox* by Costantia Manoli, illustrated by Magdalena Mora
- *Abdul’s Story* by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow, illustrated by Tiffany Rose
- *A New School Year: Stories in Six Voices* by Sally Derby, illustrated by Mika Song
- *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael López

Consider This

- How are we reinforcing notions of schools and students that are “good” and “bad”?
- How do we model and demonstrate what a vibrant learning environment looks like?
- How do the harms of segregation differ for white students and students of color in different school settings? Why does that matter to us all?
- What might be possible if we were to strive to make our learning communities inclusive and equitable, regardless of the demographics of the student population?
- What does a vibrant and rich learning environment look like? Feel like? When have you experienced that? When have you not?

Talk Together

- What does it feel like to be included?
- What does it feel like not being able to share your special self?
- What makes a teacher?

Engage

- What would school look like if you made it exactly the way you wanted it? Maybe the cafeteria would have robots handing out your lunch or the playground would be equipped with a water slide! Dream big! Design a “dream school” in your chosen art form—painting, drawing, writing, etc.

Explore More

- Science Animated’s YouTube video “Why are schools in the U.S. still racially segregated?” (February 14, 2022)
- “School Integration: How It Can Promote Social Cohesion and Combat Racism” by Richard D. Kahlenberg, Halley Potter, and Kimberly Quick (American Federation of Teachers)
- Black History in Two Minutes or So’s YouTube video “School Integration” (December 11, 2020)
- PBS’s video “Ruby Bridges Goes to School”