

Middle Grades

Equality Under Law

Overview

Using a series of quotes and working in teams, students will develop a broad understanding of the concept of equality.

Preparation

■ Read the insert on *Brown* in the planning guide; become familiar with the facts.

■ Make two copies of each of the following quotes.

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

Chief Justice Earl Warren, Court Opinion, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)

2. *“We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.”*

Declaration of Independence (1776)

3. *“Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens.”*

Justice John Marshall Harlan

4. *“All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”*

U.S. Constitution, Article XIV, Section 1

Presentation

- Ask the students to define *equality*. Use a classroom dictionary to document the definition.
- Divide the class into eight teams. Distribute one quote to each team. Having eight teams allows for smaller discussion groups.
- Ask each team to review their quote and establish consensus on what equality is. Allow about five to seven minutes for each team to complete the assignment.
- As the teams are working, write the four quote sources on the board or flipchart.
- Call time. Have each team report their findings—reporting one quote at a time. As the first team finishes, ask the second group reviewing the same quote if they have any additional findings.
- As the teams report, capture their findings briefly under the appropriate quote reference on the board or flipchart.
- When all teams have completed their reports, provide a brief background of the quote.
- Bring closure to the activity by asking the following questions.

- Is there a difference in the meaning of the term “equality” among the quotes? If so, what is it?
- What is the status of equality now?
- What debates about equality do you see in the future?



Websites/Resources

www.abanet.org/publiced/conversations/brownvboard.pdf

Contains another version of this lesson, and much more.

www.abanet.org/publiced/lawday/schools/lessons/79_equal1.html

An additional and extended lesson on equal protection.

www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/ka1.htm

The *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historical Site provides topics that can be used in a class discussion to introduce *Brown v. Board of Education* and then carry the discussion into a larger civil rights discussion. Each of the segments provides a printable photo with background to use as discussion points.

www.landmarkcases.org

The Street Law site includes a sequential series of activities depending on available class time. Three examples include

- Does Treating People Equally Mean Treating Them the Same?
- Classifying Arguments in the Case
- All Deliberate Speed