

**The Use of U.S. Military Forces in Domestic Affairs: The Desegregation of  
Little Rock Central High School - 1957**  
**Michael Pollock / Urbana High School / Civil Rights Institute Lesson Plan**  
**Summer 2010**

**Lesson Abstract:**

Students will investigate the events in Little Rock Arkansas in 1957 in which President Dwight Eisenhower nationalized the Arkansas National Guard and called in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne division of the U.S. Army to enforce the federal court ordered integration of Central High School. Using primary documents, students will discuss the issues of civil rights, federalism, and Southern resistance to 1954's Brown v. Board of Education decision.

**Essential Questions / Enduring Understandings:**

- What is federalism, and what state versus national concerns played out in the Little Rock conflict in 1957?
- Should states have the authority to control their own public schools?
- Is it appropriate to use federal military forces to settle domestic disputes, and if so, when?
- What can documents from the past tell us about the emotions and arguments about civil rights issues?
- Students will understand the concept of federalism, where the balance of power resides between the state and federal governments, and the conflict in the Little Rock crisis between the State of Arkansas (Orval Faubus) and the U.S. Government (U.S. Supreme Court and President Dwight Eisenhower)
- Students will be able to trace the Little Rock conflict and the intervention of first, Arkansas National Guard troops, and later, President Eisenhower's use of the armed forces to establish federal supremacy.
- Students will be able to analyze specific primary documents and present that analysis and the document's significance to the class.

**Assessment:**

Student learning will be assessed based upon student discussion, document analysis sheets, small group interpretation and presentation of primary source documents, and individual student writing projects.

**Setting the Purpose:**

Following lesson(s) on the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education case, students will read materials about Southern resistance to the enforcement of the decision and how events in the desegregation plans in Little Rock AK reflected the anger and resentment of Southern whites. Documents will detail:

- |   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| *Southern resistance to enforcement of Brown v. Board | (Document Group 4) |
| *steps taken to prevent violence                      | (Document Group 5) |
| *the use of military force                            | (Document Group 6) |
| *reactions to the use of the military                 | (Document Group 7) |

**Lesson One: 1-2 days**

This lesson is designed to review the Brown v. Board of Education decision, the types of resistance seen in the South prior to the 1957 Little Rock Crisis, and the concept and Constitutional issue of federalism. Split the class into heterogeneous groups of 3-4 students.

1. Have the groups briefly discuss and summarize the Brown v. Board decision, and share their findings with the class
2. Optional: Watch the Emmitt Till and Montgomery Bus Boycott segments of *Eyes on the Prize*, and compare the types of resistance and results seen in those clips and discuss. How were the events similar? How did they differ?
3. As a whole class, read and review the relevant sections of the U.S. Constitution. What does it tell us about the federal government's role in education, domestic use of the military, state v. federal powers, and civil rights?

**Lesson Two: 2-3 days**

Class should break into the same groups. Each group will get a packet of primary source documents containing one document from each of the following categories:

1. Examples of Southern resistance in Little Rock, Arkansas prior to the Arkansas National Guard's blockade of Central High School on September 2, 1957 to prevent black students from entering the building.
2. Examples of steps taken and commentary on the possible intervention of federal troops
3. Examples documenting the nationalization of the Arkansas National Guard and the introduction of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne division of the U.S. Army
4. Reaction to the President's use of federal force to re-establish order and enforce federal court rulings.

Each group should work together to fill out document analysis sheets and answer the key questions posed. Each group will then present their documents and findings to the class.

**Optional activity:** In the computer lab, each group creates a PowerPoint presentation with their documents for use in their class presentation.

**Optional Assessment:** Each student will write a 1-2 page essay answering the key questions for this topic.