



We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution

Directed by the Center for Civic Education
Funded by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress



Melissa Bell

Pennsylvania Congressional District 15 Co-Coordinator

HOW DOES THE CONSTITUTION PROTECT YOUR RIGHT TO EQUAL PROTECTION OF THE LAWS?

- **Grade Levels:** 3-6
- **Academic Standards:** Academic Standards for Civics and Government 5.1E and 5.1L; 5.2C and 5.2E; and 5.3G and 5.3H.
- **Submitted by:** This lesson was created by Melissa Bell, a retired educator from Allentown and a district coordinator for We The People.

We The People is a program developed by The Center for Civic Education. Lessons produced by We The People are designed for K-12 students and address concepts of government and citizenship. Lesson 19 in the We The People elementary text, “How does the Constitution protect your right to equal protection of the laws?”, is the focus of this lesson plan. Students will learn about the Fourteenth Amendment and the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision handed down in 1954. A literature connection is made to “The Story of Ruby Bridges” by Robert Coles.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY TO LESSON 19:

Form groups of three to five students. Each group should discuss one of the situations listed below and decide if the government was acting fairly. The reasons for decisions reached should be shared with the class.

1. A new law in your state says that you must go to a certain school because of your race.
2. Your town has a law that says you cannot live in a certain area because of your religion.
3. Your city police department will not allow women on the police force.
4. Your state has a law that says you cannot marry someone of a different race.
5. A man and a woman work for the state government at the same jobs. The man is paid much more than the woman is paid.

TERMS TO UNDERSTAND:

Boycott

Civil Rights Act of 1964

Civil War Amendments

Equal protection clause

Equal protection of the laws

Segregate



We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution

Directed by the Center for Civic Education
Funded by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress



Melissa Bell

Pennsylvania Congressional District 15 Co-Coordinator

ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

Several formats can be used in addressing the following questions — jigsaw, mini-mock legislative hearings or other similar participatory activities.

- **Why was the Fourteenth Amendment needed?**
To stop state governments from unfairly discriminating against African Americans. The amendment states, “No State shall....deny to any person....the equal protection of the laws.” This clause prohibits laws that unfairly favor some groups over others. States continued to pass laws that permitted unfair discrimination, such as segregated schools, trains and buses and laws which denied the right to vote to African Americans.
- **What is the importance of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court?**
The decision stated that “separate but equal” adopted in *Plessy v. Ferguson* has no place in the field of public education.” The We The People text provides several quotes from the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision handed down in 1954.
- **How did people work to change the laws and end unfair discrimination?**
The Civil Rights Movement and boycotts such as the one staged in Alabama in 1955 after the arrest of Rosa Parks.
- **How has the equal protection clause helped other groups in America?**
Asians, Latinos, Native Americans, people with disabilities, the elderly and women’s groups have worked to gain the right to equal protection. Unfair discrimination now includes a person’s age, ethnic background, disability and gender.

LESSON REVIEW: Discuss questions listed below:

1. Why was the Fourteenth Amendment added to the U.S. Constitution?
2. What does “equal protection of the laws” mean?
3. Why did the Fourteenth Amendment not end unfair treatment of African Americans?
4. Why was the *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court decision so important?
5. Give some examples of how people of different races and backgrounds worked to change unfair laws.
6. Why was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 important?



We the People...
The Citizen and the Constitution

Directed by the Center for Civic Education
Funded by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress



Melissa Bell
Pennsylvania Congressional District 15 Co-Coordinator

LITERATURE CONNECTION:

“THE STORY OF RUBY BRIDGES”

by Robert Coles

SUMMARY: Six-year-old Ruby Bridges is the first black child to attend an all-white elementary school. Escorted by federal marshals, she faces angry protestors with courage and dignity as she becomes the focus of hatred and prejudice.

This book was written by a child psychologist who met with Ruby several times during her first-grade year. It is beautifully illustrated and can easily serve as a “read-a-loud” to the class. The story takes place in New Orleans in 1960.

Read the story aloud, then ask the questions listed below:

1. Why did the President of the United States order federal marshals to walk Ruby to school each day?
2. How did Ruby’s teacher treat her when she was in her class?
3. Why do you think Ruby prayed for those who hated her?
4. How did Ruby Bridges, only six-years-old, contribute to changing unfair laws?
5. How did the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision affect the lives of children like Ruby Bridges?