

US HISTORY EXAMPLE LESSON PLAN: REACTION TO BROWN VERSUS BOARD OF EDUCATION

Goals and Objectives

Students will be able to use polling data to examine “contemporary conflicts over Constitutional principles” (see *CT Council for the Social Studies Content Standard 5.1*), in this case, conflict over the desegregation of public schools mandated by *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Students will be asked to locate polling data from 1954 to 1970 to trace Americans’ sentiment towards school desegregation and to present the trends they find graphically by transferring the frequency tables offered by iPOLL into line graphs.

Lesson Overview and Activity

Initiation. Show headlines from newspapers that broadcasted the significance of the *Brown* decision when it happened in 1954.

Development. Discuss with students the historical impact of the *Brown* decision on the subsequent Civil Rights Movement. Can we see this impact in public opinion during the fifteen years after the decision? Was the shift in public opinion on the issue of school segregation dramatic or slight?

Activity. Ask students to locate questions in iPOLL by constraining their search from 1954 to 1970 and typing in “segregation,” (2a) or if a computer lab is unavailable, provide a handout with 10 questions from this period that the students can examine on their own (2b).

Questions. Ask students to consider the following questions:

- How did respondents feel about the issue of segregation in 1954? In 1964? In 1968?
- What polling questions help you to answer the previous question?
- Which questions about school segregation were asked the exact same way over this time period?
- If you look solely at these questions, how would you characterize Americans’ feelings on this topic over time? Did they become more sympathetic to desegregation?

Graphing. Describe for students the difference between a line and a bar graph (line graphs are often used to show trends over time) and discuss with students why we sometimes use graphs to present the data that we find in frequency tables (they allow us to collapse the data from multiple questions into one, easy-to-read product). Discuss how, in order to answer the question of whether Americans grew to support desegregation during this period, a line graph might be useful.

Requirements

1. Student knowledge about the segregation in the US and the *Brown* decision.

2a. Two class periods, one of which should include ½ hour when students can search for polling questions using iPOLL.

2b...Or one class period and a handout with the frequencies for at least 10 polling questions that students can examine on their own.

Example Frequency Table

The US Supreme Court has ruled that racial segregation in the public schools is illegal. This means that all children, no matter what their race, must be allowed to go to the same schools. Do you approve or disapprove of this decision?

58% Approve
36% Disapprove
6% No opinion

Source:
Gallup Poll (AIPO)
July 1957

Closure

Emphasize for students the significance of racial segregation in the US and how Americans’ opinions about segregation have formed in reaction to changes in federal legislation concerning the issue.

Assessment

Assignment: Ask students to graph approval rates for desegregation for as much of the 1954- 1970 period as possible, given the data available. **Evaluation:** Did they position the points of the line over the appropriate years? Did they plot approval rates and not disapproval? Did they accurately label the graph axes?