



MUSEUM OF TOLERANCE  
A SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER MUSEUM

## Teacher's Guide



## PARA TODOS LOS NIÑOS - IMPORTANT RULINGS ON SCHOOL SEGREGATION AND THE IMPACT TODAY

WRITTEN BY JEFF SAPP

learn from the past    engage the present    shape the future

## LESSON: PARA TODOS LOS NIÑOS - IMPORTANT RULINGS ON SCHOOL SEGREGATION AND THE IMPACT TODAY

### RELATED EXHIBIT: PARA TODOS LOS NIÑOS FOR ALL THE CHILDREN

#### OVERVIEW

Most students have heard of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the historic 1954 Supreme Court ruling that officially ended segregation in public schools. Likewise, most students understand that the plaintiffs, the Brown family, were an African-American family. Students usually

are not familiar, however, with an important case in 1947, before *Brown v. Board of Education: Mendez v. Westminster School District*. In this case a Mexican-American family fought to integrate schools in California. During this project, students will research segregation in the mid-20th century and learn of the key roles Latinos have played, together with African-Americans, in the continuing battles for civil rights for all Americans.

#### OBJECTIVES

- Students will synthesize material and information on *Mendez v. Westminster* and prepare a 10-slide PowerPoint presentation on their chosen/assigned research topic, which they will present to their class.
- Having heard multiple presentations on *Mendez v. Westminster*, students will apply what they've learned to today's education system.

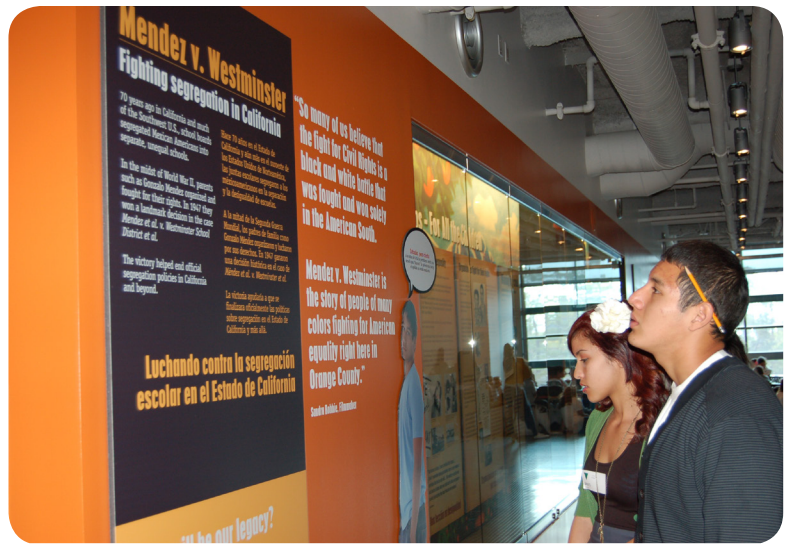
#### ENDURING UNDERSTANDING(S)

Students will take away some of the following enduring understandings:

- Ordinary people with diverse backgrounds have fought for equity throughout history.
- Although much has been accomplished as a result of court cases like *Mendez v. Westminster* and *Brown v. Board of Education*, today's schools are more segregated than in the 40s and 50s for different reasons.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S)

- What is segregation? Does it still exist?
- How close to, or far from, fully embracing the *Mendez* decision are we today?
- If *Mendez v. Westminster* hadn't happened, how do you imagine your life being today?
- Why do you think that students today have little knowledge of *Mendez v. Westminster*? Do you think that the *Mendez v. Westminster* case should be included in U.S. History textbooks? Why or why not?



## KEY ISSUES/CONCEPTS

- Courage
- Community
- Commitment
- Ordinary People
- Social Engagement
- Transforming the Community

For definitions related to this lesson see key *Vocabulary and Terms*

## SUBJECT AREA/CONTENT AREA CONNECTIONS

Social Studies, U.S. History, World History, Civics, Government, Politics, Global Studies, Spanish

## TIME/MATERIALS

- This large research project can be done in collaborative groups and bolstered by individual assignments. Time frames will vary based on available hours in any given class.
- One copy of the research handout for each student.

## POSSIBLE PROCESSES

This research project can unfold in various ways depending on the students and time allotted for the project. We suggest a couple of ways to go about this lesson plan, like the following:

### PROCESS 1: LOOSELY FRAMED

#### • Step 1: Overview of Lesson

Read the lesson overview to students as a way to introduce the topic and/or show students the “No Spanish or Mexicans” primary document sign, asking, “I know you’ve probably seen photographs of signs like this for African-Americans, but have you seen this one for Latinos? When and where do you think this sign comes from?”

#### • Step 2: Research Assignment

Give a copy of the Research Handout to each student.

#### • Step 3: PowerPoint Presentation

Inform students they are to research anything or anyone on the Research Handout and prepare a 10-slide PowerPoint presentation to deliver to the class.

#### • Step 4: Culminating Video

As a culminating activity, show the YouTube film *Mendez v. Westminster School District et al*, OC Human Relations Legacy Awards (published May 8, 2014.)

#### • Step 5: Segregation Today

Conclude with *Segregation Now* at

<http://www.propublica.org/article/segregation-now-the-resegregation-of-america-schools/#intro>, a startling look at how students today are worse off than ever when it comes to segregation. Use the Segregation Today Handout to highlight how there is still so much more work to be done to integrate the schools in America.

- **Step 6: Reflection**

Ask students to discuss or do independent writing on the following questions:

- Why were *Mendez v. Westminster* and *Brown v. Board of Education* useful?
- Do you think we're worse off now than when these court cases were resolved? If so, why?
- In what ways can we work toward more integrated schools today in our own communities?

## PROCESS 2: TIGHTLY FRAMED

- **Step 1: Overview of Lesson**

Read the lesson overview to students as a way to introduce the topic and/or show students the “No Spanish or Mexicans” primary document sign, asking, “I know you’ve probably seen photographs of signs like this for African-Americans, but have you seen this one for Latinos? When and where do you think this sign comes from?”

- **Step 2: Individual/Group Research Assignment**

Give a copy of the Research Handout to each student and assign students specific aspects of the project to research. For example:

- o Student or Group 1 synthesizes and tells the story of the children’s book, *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family’s Fight for Desegregation*. The teacher will have to purchase this book or find it at the school/local library. This presentation would make a good introduction presentation.
- o Student or Group 2 explores the Internet resource, ‘**Before *Brown v. Board of Education* There Was *Mendez v. Westminster***’, then synthesizes what they consider to be the main points they find on the site.
- o Student or Group 3 explores the Internet resource, ‘**The Legacy of *Mendez* and *Brown*: A Promise to Fulfill**’, then synthesizes what they consider to be the main points they find on the site.
- o Student or Group 4 explores the Internet resource, ‘***Mendez v. Westminster* Case**’, then synthesizes what they consider to be the main points they find on the site.
- o Student or Group 5 researches the 5 Mexican-American fathers who were the plaintiffs in the case: Thomas Estrada, William Guzman, Gonzalo Mendez, Frank Palomino, and Lorenzo Ramirez, creates 2 slides per plaintiff.
- o Student or Group 6 researches the Mendez children – Gonzalo, Geronimo, and Sylvia. Instruct them to find out how this groundbreaking case impacted them throughout their lives. Students will, no doubt, find the most about Sylvia and it is fine that their presentation will focus more on her than her brothers.
- o Student or Group 7 researches attorney David Marcus, Senior District Judge Paul J. McCormick, and Governor Earl Warren. Students will explain what roles they played in the case.
- o Student or Group 8 synthesizes and tells the story of the children’s book, ‘**Sylvia & Aki**’. The teacher will have to purchase this book or find it at the school/local library.

- **Step 3: PowerPoint Presentation**

Have students use the results of their research to prepare a 10-slide PowerPoint presentation to deliver to the class.

- **Step 4: Culminating Video**

As a culminating activity, show the YouTube film *Mendez v. Westminster School District et al, OC Human Relations Legacy Awards* (published May 8, 2014.).

- **Step 5: Segregation Today**

Conclude with *Segregation Now* at

<http://www.propublica.org/article/segregation-now-the-resegregation-of-americas-schools/#intro>,

a startling look at how students today are worse off than ever when it comes to segregation. Use the Segregation Today Handout to highlight how there is still much more work to be done to integrate the schools in America. For a more specific illustration of segregation in one region, use the Segregation Today in Southern California Handout.

- **Step 6: Reflection**

Ask students to discuss or do independent writing on the following questions:

- o Why were *Mendez v. Westminster* and *Brown v. Board of Education* useful?
- o Do you think we're worse off now than when these court cases were resolved? If so, why?
- o In what ways can we work toward more integrated schools today in our own communities?

**BOOKS**

*Mendez v. Westminster:  
School Desegregation and Mexican-  
American Rights*

(\$17.95) by Philippa Strum

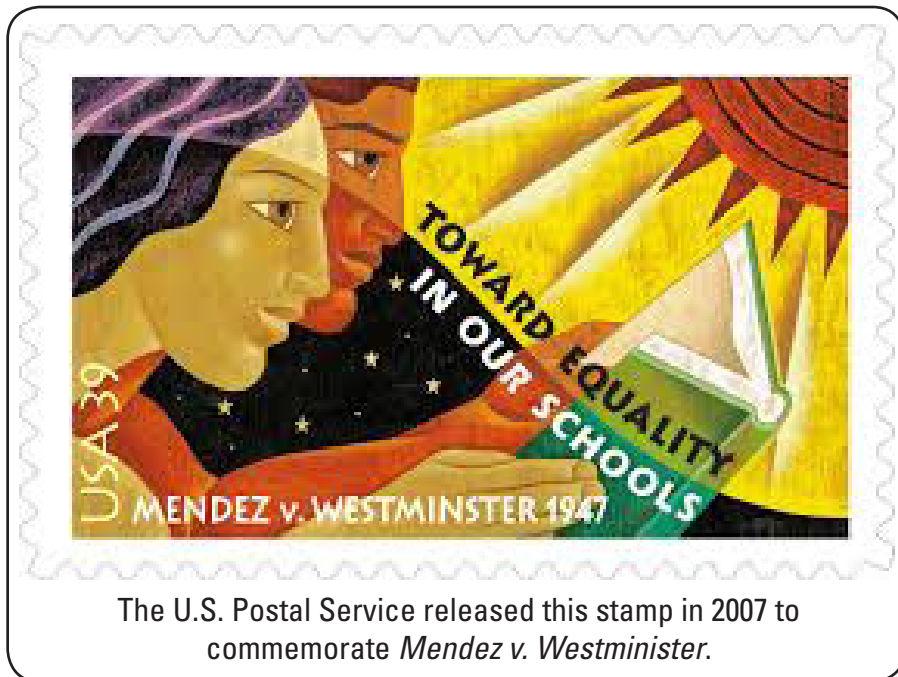
Details the famous case with narratives, personality portraits, and case analyses. This is a good resource for the teacher in terms of the court case.

ISBN# 978-0-7006-1719-7

**University Press of Kansas**

**(785) 864-4155**

**[www.kansaspress.ku.edu](http://www.kansaspress.ku.edu)**



The U.S. Postal Service released this stamp in 2007 to commemorate *Mendez v. Westminster*.

*Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation*

(\$11.98) by Duncan Tonatuh

A children's picture book that beautifully synthesizes the story of this important case in United States civil rights history.

ISBN# 978-1419710544

**Harry N. Abrams**

**(212) 206-7715**

**[www.abramsbooks.com](http://www.abramsbooks.com)**

*Sylvia & Aki*

(\$6.99) by Winifred Conkling

Tells the remarkable story of young Sylvia Mendez and Aki Munemitsu and how their lives intersected on a Southern California farm.

ISBN# 978-1582463452

**Random House Kids**

**(212) 572-2232**

**[www.randomhousekids.com](http://www.randomhousekids.com)**

**ON THE INTERNET**

BEFORE BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION THERE WAS MENDEZ V. WESTMINSTER

<http://blogs.loc.gov/law/2014/05/before-brown-v-board-of-education-there-was-mendez-v-westminster/>

This online archive from The Library of Congress delves into this lesser-known case that was instrumental for the American civil rights movement and desegregation of public schools.

MENDEZ V. WESTMINSTER HISTORY

<http://www.sylviamendezinthemendezvwestminster.com>

This website is about Sylvia Mendez, the daughter of Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez. She tells their story as a dedicated speaker and champion of change.

THE LEGACY OF MENDEZ AND BROWN: A PROMISE TO FULFILL

<http://www.idra.org/mendezbrown/promise.html>

This site asks whether or not *Mendez v. Westminster* has fulfilled the promise of quality education for Latino students and offers suggestions on how to make good on the promise of equal education.

MENDEZ V. WESTMINSTER CASE

<http://mendezwestminstercase.blogspot.com>

A blog of useful resources on the 1947 desegregation case that contains a summary of the case, links, and photographs.

SYLVIA MENDEZ V. WESTMINSTER

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQVbIGpHBdU>

A film by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies highlights Sylvia Mendez, one of the child plaintiffs in the *Mendez v. Westminster* case.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT

<https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu>

The mission of the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles is to help renew the civil rights movement, conducting research and providing resources.

**KEY PEOPLE TO RESEARCH**

Robert Lee Carter	Lorenzo Ramirez
Thomas Estrada	Sylvia Mendez
William Guzman	Geronimo Mendez
Thurgood Marshall	David Marcus
Gonzalo Mendez	Paul J. McCormick
Frank Palomino	Earl Warren





Confront serious levels of segregation by race and poverty – particularly in the west, where non-English-speaking Latinos tend to be segregated in schools with each other. Latino students remain the most segregated minority group in U.S. schools. Immigrant Latinos also are at risk of experiencing linguistic segregation. Latino enrollment in U.S. schools is nearly one-fourth of its enrollment.

Education for Blacks is more segregated than it was in 1968.

Black students are the most likely racial group to attend what researchers call “apartheid schools,” — schools that are virtually all non-white and where poverty, limited resources, social strife and health problems abound. One-sixth of America’s black students attend these schools.

Whites are the most segregated group in the nation’s public schools. Only 14% of white students attend multiracial schools (where three or more racial groups are present). Outside the south and southwest, most white students have very little contact with students of color.

Asian American students are the most integrated group in the nation’s public schools. Three-fourths of Asian Americans attend multiracial schools.

Racial segregation in schools is strongly linked to segregation by socio-economic class. Nearly 90% of intensely segregated, black and Latino schools are also schools where at least half of the student body is economically disadvantaged.

Today’s segregated schools are still unequal. Segregated schools have higher concentrations of poverty, much lower test scores, less experienced teachers and fewer advanced placement courses.

Students in integrated schools perform better on tests, possess elevated aspirations for educational and occupational attainment, and lead more integrated lives.

\* Source of Information: The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, May 15, 2014

There are 3.6 million public school students in the six counties that make up Southern California – Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, San Bernardino, and Riverside. One-fifth of all Latinos in the United States attend school in Southern California.

In the last twenty years, the characteristics of the student population in Southern California have shifted dramatically. Most dramatic has been the increase in Latino students so that by 2008 one out of every two students in California schools was Latino. One in ten students in the region was Asian. Black students represent 8% of the student population. LAUSD has the highest enrollments of Latino and Black students. In 1970, the average Latino student went to an LAUSD school that was about 45% white. By 1980, the proportion of white students had decreased to 21% and, more recently, the typical Latino student in LAUSD goes to a school where 6% of the students are white. The demographics have shifted just as dramatically for areas of LAUSD where predominantly black students reside and go to school and today most black students attend a school that is around 6% white as well. By the start of the 21st century, more than two out of five Latino students and one-third of all black students in the region enrolled in intensely segregated schools – schools where 90-100% of the students were of minority backgrounds.

Race isn't the only indicator of segregated schools though. Poverty and language play key roles as well. More than half of Southern California's students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch, a rough indicator of student poverty in the area. Poor children are much more likely than non-poor children to attend schools with higher populations of black and Latino students. The same is true of linguistic ability as Latino students are most likely to attend schools with high concentrations of English Language Learners, as much as 30% of the total enrollment of their school being ELLs.

Teacher quality is a major factor in indicating students' academic success. Students in intensely segregated schools like many in LAUSD were close to three times as likely to have a teacher lacking full qualifications than those students attending majority white and Asian schools.

Why does any of this matter? For one, if you want to graduate and go to college you need access to college preparation courses (A-G requirements) and highly segregated schools experience a greater shortage of A-G courses being offered compared to white and Asian schools. Less than 50% of black and Latino 9th graders graduate on time whereas 81% of white and Asian 9th-graders graduate on time. The continued segregation of Southern California schools hurts everyone. Desegregation is a critical element in developing the region's human capital and preparing students for collaborative work and community life.

(Source of Information: The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, March 18, 2011)