
More than 50 years after heavily armed federal troops escorted nine African American students into Central High School; it’s easy to scoff at the results of desegregation. This is not a lesson/video that attempts to analyze the ambiguous legacy of desegregation. Instead it celebrates the determination and sacrifice of those individuals who were the shock troops in this struggle. And, to a lesser extent, it attempts to examine some of the resistance to school integration. You will watch the video, but through writing you will also be asked to “become” the individuals whose lives shaped and were shaped by these key civil rights battles.

Directions:

1. 
   During video: I will be asking you to do some writing based on the events depicted in the video. You’ll have the choice of writing an interior monologue or a dialogue (two-voice) poems. As such, you should write down incidents during the video that you find especially sad, admirable, inspiring, or outrageous. You might also write your impressions of particular characters or events. You are urged to “steal” a line or two from the narrator or people interviewed (A transcript of the video is located at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/about/pt_102.html). You should incorporate some or all of these into your writing.

2. I will stop the video immediately after Elizabeth Eckford (one of the 9 students chosen to desegregate Little Rock’s Central High School) gets on the bus. We will read aloud the dramatic account excerpted from the NAACP leader Daisy Bates’ The Long Shadow of Little Rock, located below as the handout “Inside Elizabeth Ann Eckford.”

Eyes on the Prize Video Series

Previously on Episode 1: Awakenings (1954-1956) Awakenings focuses on the catalytic events of 1954-1956. The Mississippi lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till led to a widely publicized trial where a courageous black man took the stand and accused two white men of murder. In Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks refused to yield her bus seat to a white man and triggered a yearlong boycott that resulted in the desegregation of public buses. Ordinary citizens and local leaders joined the black struggle for freedom. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was formed. In response, many white southerners closed ranks in opposition to the burgeoning black rights movement. Racial discrimination finally became a political issue.

Episode 2: Fighting Back (1957-1962) Fighting Back follows the struggle for equality from the schoolroom to the courtroom and back as blacks reject the existing system of “separate but equal” education. In 1954, the Supreme Court also rejects the system with its historic Brown v. Board of Education decision. The legal battle won, in 1957 nine black teenagers dare to integrate Little Rock’s Central High School. In 1962, a resolute James Meredith enrolls at the University of Mississippi. Students, parents, and lawyers unite to guarantee a better education and a better future for their children.
Inside
Elizabeth Ann Eckford

THAT NIGHT I WAS SO EXCITED I couldn’t sleep. The next morning I was about the first one up. While I was pressing my black-and-white dress—I had made it to wear on the first day of school—my little brother turned on the TV set. They started telling about a large crowd gathered at the school. The man on TV said he wondered if we were going to show up that morning. Mother called from the kitchen, where she was fixing breakfast, “Turn that TV off!” She was so upset and worried. I wanted to comfort her, so I said, “Mother, don’t worry.”

Dad was walking back and forth, from room to room, with a sad expression. He was chewing on his pipe and he had a cigar in his hand, but he didn’t light either one. It would have been funny only he was so nervous.

Before I left home Mother called us into the living room. She said we should have a word of prayer. Then I caught the bus and got off a block from the school. I saw a large crowd of people standing across the street from the soldiers guarding Central...

[Little Rock School] Superintendent Blossom had told us to enter by the front door. I looked at all the people and thought, “Maybe I will be safer if I walk down the block to the front entrance behind the guards.”

At the corner I tried to pass through the long line of guards around the school so as to enter the grounds behind them. One of the guards pointed across the street. So I pointed in the same direction and asked whether he meant for me to cross the street and walk down. He nodded “yes.” So, I walked across the street conscious of the crowd that stood there, but they moved away from me.

For a moment all I could hear was the shuffling of their feet. Then, someone shouted. “Here she comes, get ready!” I moved away from the crowd on the sidewalk and into the street. If the mob came at me I could then cross back over so the guards could protect me.

The crowd moved in closer and then began to follow me, calling me names. I still wasn’t afraid. Just a little bit nervous. Then my knees started to shake all of a sudden and I wondered whether I could make it to the center entrance a block away. It was the longest block I ever walked in my whole life.

Even so, I still wasn’t too scared because all the time I kept thinking that the guards would protect me.

When I got right in front of the school, I went up to a guard again. But this time he just looked straight ahead and didn’t move to let me pass him. I didn’t know what to do. Then I looked and saw that the path leading to the front entrance was a little farther ahead. So I walked until I was right in front of the path to the front door.

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I stood looking at the school—it looked so big! Just then the guards let some white students go through.

The crowd was quiet. I guess they were waiting to see what was going to happen. When I was able to steady my knees, I walked up to the guard who had let the white students in. He too didn’t move. When I tried to squeeze past him, he raised his bayonet and then the other guards closed in and they raised their bayonets.

They glared at me with a mean look and I was very frightened and didn’t know what to do. I turned around and the crowd came toward me.

They moved closer and closer. Somebody started yelling, “Lynch her! Lynch her!”

I tried to see a friendly face somewhere in the mob—someone who maybe would help. I looked into the face of an old woman and it seemed a kind face, but when I looked at her again, she spat on me.

They came closer, shouting, “No nigger bitch is going to get in our school. Get out of here!”

I turned back to the guards but their faces told me I wouldn’t get help from them. Then I looked down the block and saw a bench at the bus stop. I thought, “If I can only get there I will be safe.” I don’t know why the bench seemed a safe place to me, but I started walking toward it. I tried to close my mind to what they were shouting, and kept saying to myself, “If I can only make it to the bench I will be safe.”

When I finally got there, I don’t think I could have gone another step. I sat down and the mob crowded up and began shouting all over again. Someone hollered, “Drag her over to this tree! Let’s take care of the nigger.” Just then a white man sat down beside me, put his arm around me and patted my shoulder. He raised my chin and said, “Don’t let them see you cry.”

Then, a white lady—she was very nice—she came over to me on the bench. She spoke to me but I don’t remember now what she said. She put me on the bus and sat next to me. She asked me my name and tried to talk to me but I don’t think I answered. I can’t remember much about the bus ride, but the next thing I remember I was standing in front of the School for the Blind, where Mother works.

I thought, “Maybe she isn’t here. But she has to be here!” So I ran upstairs, and I think some teachers tried to talk to me, but I kept running until I reached Mother’s classroom.

Mother was standing at the window with her head bowed, but she must have sensed I was there because she turned around. She looked as if she had been crying, and I wanted to tell her I was all right. But I couldn’t speak. She put her arms around me and I cried.

Post Video Discussion Questions:

1. The narrator in the video comments that because other forms of integration had been successful in Little Rock, some people hoped that the same would be true for school integration. Why wasn’t this the case?

2. Why did President Eisenhower not act sooner to force Governor Faubus to allow the 9 students into Central High School?

3. Eisenhower sends in the troops to protect the “Little Rock Nine.” The Eyes on the Prize narrator comments, “The troops did not, however, mean the end of harassment; it means the declaration of war.” Who were the sides in the war? What were they fighting for?

4. Melba Pattillo Beals describes how she was tripped and fell onto broken glass. Why did the black students put up with all the abuse?

5. Look at the comments by the white student about Spanish and Chinese people:

   “If a Spanish or a Chinese person come here it wouldn’t be hard to get along with them. It’s just that the Negroes are what you might say, more different to us than a Spanish person might be.”

6. Why does Melba burn her books?

7. Analyze the Ross Barnett quote from his speech at the Mississippi-Kentucky football game. Who are the “people” he refers to? What is their “heritage?”

   “I love Mississippi. I love her people, our customs. I love and respect our heritage.”

8. The reporter asks James Meredith if he felt guilty for the deaths at Ole Miss. Should Meredith have felt guilty? If Meredith hadn’t been so diplomatic, how might he have responded?

Possible roles for writing:

- James Meredith when the reporter asks him if he feels guilty
- Ernest Green when he walks across the stage to accept his diploma
- Melba watching her books burn
- Minnie Jean she dumps chili on the head of the white boy who harassed her
- The all-black cafeteria workers watching and applauding
- Dialogue poem from the standpoint of black and white students in Central High School
- Dialogue poem from the standpoint of white and black reporters about any of the events depicted in the video.

*Interior Monologue* – simply the imagined thoughts of a any character in the video. Interior monologues tap into the innermost feelings of a character.

*Dialogue Poem* - address controversy and differing opinions. These poems can express conflict between people in opposing situations—such as a Hiroshima bomb victim and a U.S. Air Force pilot flying the plan that dropped the bomb. Or dialogue poems can reflect commonalities between people who might not appear to have obvious similarities.

A *dialogue poem* reflects a dialogue between two people who represent different perspectives on a particular theme, issue, or topic. For example, in the sample provided below, *Two Women*, one representing the peasant or working class [regular font] and one representing the elite [bolded font], discuss their experiences after the election of socialist Salvador Allende as president of Chile and after his murder during the US supported military coup in 1973.
I am a woman.  
I am a woman.  

I am a woman born of a woman whose man owned a factory.  
I am a woman born of a woman whose man labored in a factory.  

I am a woman whose man wore silk suits, who constantly watched his weight.  
I am a woman whose man wore tattered clothing, whose heart was constantly strangled by hunger.  

I am a woman who watched two babies grow into beautiful children.  
I am a woman who watched two babies die because there was no milk.  

I am a woman whose man wore tattered clothing, whose heart was constantly strangled by hunger.  
I am a woman whose man wore silk suits, who constantly watched his weight.  

But then there was a man;  
But then there was a man;  

And he talked about the peasants getting richer by my family getting poorer.  
And he told me of days that would be better and he made the days better.  

We had to eat rice.  
We had rice.  

We had to eat beans!  
We had beans.  

My children were no longer given summer visas to Europe.  
My children no longer cried themselves to sleep.  

And I felt like a peasant.  
And I felt like a woman.  

A peasant with a dull, hard, unexciting life.  
Like a woman with a life that sometimes allowed a song.  

And I saw a man.  
And I saw a man.  

And together we began to plot with the hope of the return to freedom.  
I saw his heart begin to beat with hope of freedom, at last.  

Someday, the return to freedom.  
Someday freedom.  

And then,  
But then,  

One day,  
One day,  

There were plans overhead and guns firing close by.  
There were planes overhead and guns firing in the distance.  

I gathered my children and went home.  
I gathered my children and ran.  

And the guns moved farther and farther away.  
But the guns moved closer and closer.  

And then, they announced that freedom had been restored!  
And then they came, young boys really.  

They came into my home along with my man.  
They came and found my man.  

Those men whose money was almost gone.  
They found all of the men whose lives were almost their own.  

And we all had drinks to celebrate.  
And they shot them all.  

The most wonderful martinis.  
They shot my man.  

And then they asked us to dance.  
And they came for me.  

Me.  
For me, the woman.  

And my sisters.  
For my sisters.  

And then they took us.  
Then they took us.  

They took us to dinner at a small private club.  
They stripped from us the dignity we had gained.  

And they treated us to beef.  
And then they raped us.  

It was one course after another.  
One after another they came after us.  

We nearly burst we were so full.  
Lunging, plunging—sisters bleeding, sisters dying.  

It was magnificent to be free again!  
It was hardly a relief to have survived.  

The beans have almost disappeared now.  
The beans have disappeared.  

The rice—I’ve replaced it with chicken or steak.  
The rice, I cannot find it.  

And the parties continue night after night to make up for all the time wasted.  
And my silent tears are joined once more by the midnight cries of my children.  

*The period of rice and beans for the poor woman in the poem occurs after the election of the socialist, Salvador Allende, as president of Chile. Allende was elected in 1970. He was overthrown in a military coup in September 1973 after a long period of destabilization launched by the wealthy classes and supported by the US government and US corporations such as International Telephone and Telegraph. Along with thousands of others, Allende was killed by the military. The coup, under the leadership of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, launched a period of severe hardship for the working and peasant classes. Although Chile currently has a civilian government, the military is still the country’s most powerful institution.