

#10033 THE ERNEST GREEN STORY

DISNEY EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTIONS, 1993
Grade Level: 6-12
101 mins.

DESCRIPTION

In September 1957, nine black students integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. As the only senior, Ernest Green withstood harassment and intense pressures from fellow students and adults alike.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Subject Area: U.S. History—Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s)

- Standard: Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties
 - ◆ Benchmark: Understands individual and institutional influences on the civil rights movement (e.g., the origins of the postwar civil rights movement; the role of the NAACP in the legal assault on the leadership and ideologies of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X; the effects of the constitutional steps taken in the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government; the shift from de jure to de facto segregation; important milestones in the civil rights movement between 1954 and 1965; Eisenhower's reasons for dispatching federal troops to Little Rock in 1957) (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1, 3, and 4.)
- Standard: Understands domestic policies in the post-World War II period
 - ◆ Benchmark: Understands the domestic policies of Presidents Truman and Eisenhower (e.g., Eisenhower's "Modern Republicanism," Truman's Fair Deal program for securing fair employment practices, desegregation, civil rights, and race relations) (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1, 3, and 4.)

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To illustrate a significant event in the civil rights movement of the 1950s.
2. To depict the concepts of segregation and integration.
3. To show some of the legal battles to abolish segregation at the state and federal levels.
4. To illustrate the role adults and young people such as Ernest Green played in expanding the reach of the Constitution to include all Americans.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Note: *The Ernest Green Story* contains language and situations that some viewers may find offensive. Please be assured that Disney Educational Productions made their best effort to see such content included only when necessary to convey the true historical context of the civil rights era.

VOCABULARY

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. adversary | 8. extracurricular | 14. nigger |
| 2. acquiesce | activities | 15. nonconfrontational |
| 3. colored (black) | 9. federal | 16. nonviolence |
| 4. conscience | 10. injunction | 17. segregation |
| 5. constitutional rights | 11. integrations | 18. violence |
| 6. desegregate | 12. lame duck | 19. vicious |
| 7. execution (of a law) | 13. negro | |

BEFORE SHOWING

1. Create individual K-W-L charts on notebook paper. (Three columns with the headings: K: What I Know, W: What I Want to Know, and L: What I Learned.)
 - a. Write in the first column known information about Ernest Green, desegregation, or the civil rights movement.
 - b. In the second column, write things you want to know.
 - c. Notes can be taken during the video in the third column of the chart.
2. Discuss the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School in 1957 and related issues.
 - a. Was it important to desegregate Little Rock's all-white public schools or not?
 - b. Have you ever had to stand up for what you believe in, although your beliefs were unpopular? How did you feel?
 - c. How do you define a *hero*? How do you think Ernie Green's courage was tested?
 - d. What do you predict will happen to Ernie and the other African-American students who attend Central High?

DURING SHOWING

1. View the video more than once, with one showing uninterrupted.
2. Pause after the governor's statement on the radio just prior to the start of school. Clarify who was speaking and the meaning of what was said.

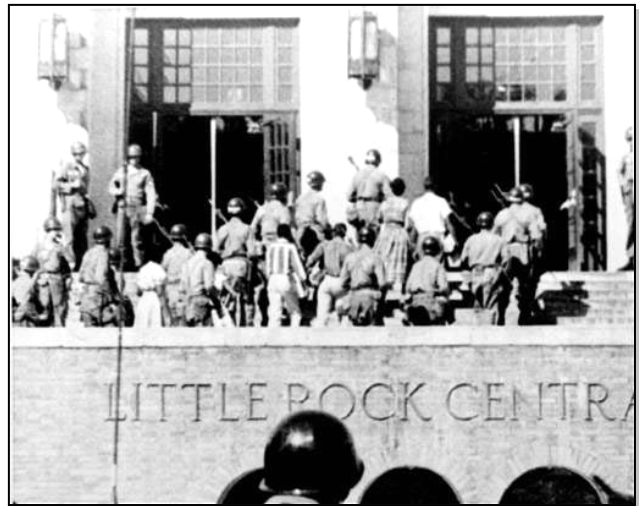
AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. Were your predictions about the movie correct? Why or why not?
2. Think about the saying, "It takes a village to raise a child." How were Ernie Green and the other African-American students at Central High supported by their families, the black community, and the local NAACP?

C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

3. Why did Ernie believe he would get a better education at Central High? What did he have to give up in return?
4. Discuss Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus's statement, "If Negro pupils should attempt to enter Central High School, blood will run in the streets." Was that an appropriate public statement to make? Explain.
5. According to Governor Faubus, why was it necessary to use the state National Guard to prevent nine black students from entering Little Rock's Central High School? What do you think his real reason was?
6. What caused President Eisenhower to send the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock and federalize the Arkansas National Guard?
7. How did Ernie's relationship with his brother change through the course of the movie?
8. Did you agree that Ernie was in danger if he continued his friendship with the white female student? Explain.
9. How did Ernie solve his difficulties with his physics teacher? How else might he have handled the situation?
10. Explain how Thurgood Marshall helped integrate Central High.
11. When the other black students were sent home because their safety was threatened, what did Ernie mean by, "It's not going to school, but it's definitely getting an education"?
12. Imagine that the mayor of Little Rock was not a lame duck and was running for reelection. How might he have acted differently?
13. Why did President Eisenhower state, "Mob rule cannot be allowed to override the decisions of our courts"?
14. What happened to Ernie and his fellow African-American students once the troops left?
15. If you were one of the African-American students at Central High, would you have stayed in school all year or would you have transferred to another school? Explain.
16. How did Ernie change during the course of his senior year? How could you tell?
17. What did you think about Governor Faubus's decision in 1958 to close the schools rather than have them integrated? How did you think it affected both black and white students?
18. How did watching a movie based on historical events help you relate to the main characters' experiences?



Applications and Activities

1. Complete the K-W-L charts begun prior to watching the video by filling in the third column. Record topics to research on the back. Discuss. (See BEFORE SHOWING.)

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2. Were the predictions about the movie correct? Why or why not?
3. Work in small groups to create a civil rights mural based on the events in the video or based on civil rights leaders.
4. Work in pairs to create a survey based on how members of different groups get along at school.
 - a. Questions might be generated by issues in the movie, such as harassment, interracial friendships, getting along with authority figures, and so on.
 - b. Remind students to conduct the survey anonymously and to draw conclusions based on the result.
5. Work in small groups and choose the roles of Ernest Green, Thurgood Marshall, the school principal, and other characters from the movie. Conduct a roundtable discussion about what happened at Little Rock in 1957.
6. Imagine you are a citizen of Little Rock during the 1957-58 school year. Write a letter to the local newspaper explaining your role in society and how you feel about the unrest at Central High.
7. Research information about the baseball star Jackie Robinson. Write an essay comparing and contrasting Jackie Robinson's and Ernie's background, actions, and emotions during their efforts to integrate formerly white institutions.
8. Summarize the main events in the movie in the form of a comic strip that younger students can read.
9. Choose a character from the movie and write journal entries from his or her point of view.
 - a. Share the problems you face and how you overcome them.
 - b. Draw on details from the movie to make the journal entries more realistic.
10. Locate quotes by notable African Americans.
 - a. Consider: Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Jackie Robinson, Charlie Parker, and the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.
 - b. Display the quotes on a poster.
11. Write a movie review that critiques and summarizes the key events in *The Ernest Green Story*. Include a catchy headline and a byline.
12. Work in small groups to reenact a key scene from the movie, but change the ending. Discuss how the changed ending might affect subsequent events in the story.
13. Research winners of the Nobel Peace Prize. Make an annotated time line of the findings.
14. Discuss how Ernie became a nonviolent activist, how his principles were challenged by racist students at Central High, and how this applies to the present day.
 - a. Brainstorm ways students can defuse conflicts at school in a similar way.
 - b. Role-play suggestions.
 - c. Invite a peace activist to school to discuss nonviolent techniques.
 - d. Write a conflict resolution manual for the school.
15. Research information about the civil rights movement. Write multiple-choice questions and answers on flashcards and place them in the class library. Possible topics include:
 - a. Rosa Parks.
 - b. The Freedom Riders.
 - c. The desegregation of "Ole Miss."

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- d. The boycotts in Birmingham, Alabama.
- e. The March on Washington.
- f. Malcolm X.
- g. The Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- h. The Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- i. The Black Panther Party.

16. Invite a guest speaker to class who remembers the civil rights movement, is a member of the local NAACP, or can explain how constitutional law affects people's daily lives.

SUMMARY

It is the summer of 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas. Ernest Green makes a choice about school—a choice that enters the history books. With eight other African-American students, Ernest (called Ernie) volunteers to integrate the all-white Little Rock Central High School. They are able to go due to a compromise between the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the local school board. Three years earlier, the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that “separate but equal” schools do not provide equal protection under the law, thus violating the Fourteenth Amendment. In Arkansas, however, politicians are under pressure from prejudiced white voters to maintain the status quo. Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, running for reelection, decides to disobey federal orders and keep the schools segregated.

When the nine black students go to school, they are met by angry, combative whites and the Arkansas National Guard. The students are not allowed to enter Central High on the first day of school. They study outside school until NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall gets a court injunction allowing them access. Marshall also pressures President Eisenhower to stop Arkansas from violating federal law. Eventually, Eisenhower responds by sending in the 101st Airborne Division to escort Ernie and his fellow students into the school.

After the armed guards leave, Ernie and the other black students face more challenges. Teachers and administrators often look the other way when white students torment them. Ernie's struggles do not end there; he finds himself challenged by physics, a graduation requirement. His teacher is prejudiced, and it's only through diligent studying and meeting with a tutor that Ernie passes the class.

As graduation day approaches, Ernie receives death threats; however, he is determined to graduate with his class. The principal tells Ernie that he can go home before the ceremony and his diploma will be mailed to him. Ernie, however, graduates without incident, and receives cheers from his loyal family and a special guest, Martin Luther King, Jr.

CMP RELATED RESOURCES

- [*The Loretta Claiborne Story* #10035](#)
- [*Rosa Parks: The Path to Freedom* #3654](#)
- [*Philip Randolph: For Jobs And Freedom* #9554](#)
- [*1960: Skin Deep* #9016](#)
- [*Black American History Series Volume 4: Civil Rights* #8641](#)

World Wide Web



The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and “kid safe” sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

- **LITTLE ROCK CENTRAL HIGH 40TH ANNIVERSARY**

<http://www.centralhigh57.org>

A comprehensive view of the events during Central High's 1957-58 school year, including photos, videos, an integration time line, an update on Ernest Green and the other African-American students in his group, and reprints of the 1957-58 school newspaper.

- **LITTLE ROCK 40 YEARS LATER**

<http://www.cnn.com/US/9709/26/little.rock.anniv/>

CNN covers the fortieth anniversary of the desegregation of Little Rock's Central High, including videos, a picture gallery, a speech by President Clinton, interviews with Ernest Green and two other black students, and an examination of race relations today.

- **CIVIL RIGHTS SPEECHES**

<http://www.pbs.org/greatspeeches/teachers/foot1.html>

A resource for teachers, this page has links to speeches by African Americans, including ones by Booker T. Washington, Jesse Jackson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Clarence Thomas.

- **LITTLE ROCK 9, INTEGRATION 0?: A COLLABORATIVE WEBQUEST ON RACIAL DESEGREGATION IN SCHOOLS**

http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/BHM/little_rock/home.html

An interactive look at the integration of Little Rock's Central High, the site challenges students to examine race relations in their own lives. Scroll down for the menu at the bottom.