

Desegregation & Little Rock:

Drama Script

One Heart, One Mind

TAHPDX: Teaching American History Project
2009

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<http://www.upa.pdx.edu/IMS/currentprojects/TAHv3/Curricula.html>

TITLE: ONE HEART, ONE MIND

CHARACTERS

HAZEL all scenes -- Hazel is the central white character. Throughout the play she goes through a personal change. She begins the play unhappy with integration and ends it coming to see Elizabeth as another person but is unable to stop the others from treating her poorly.

ELIZABETH all scenes -- Elizabeth Eckford's walk in front of the mob of people represented the beginning of a year long challenge to live a life at a school that she was not wanted at by many of the students and staff.

MOB all scenes -- Represents angry white students. A good protest sign would help to show the MOB character and this can be passed back to others.

FAUBUS sc.1 / **REPORTER** sc.2 sc.5 / **TEACHER** sc.2 & 3 -- This role could be shown by props appropriate to a teacher...a ruler...etc. The reporter could have a notepad and a pencil to represent the reporter role. The Reporter role can give exposition if needed to ground each scene and is the narrator.

GUARD sc.2 sc.3 / **MINNIJEAN** or **TERRENCE** sc. 4 and 5 -- The guard's role is protection. In one case the guard is blocking Elizabeth; in another he is saving her. Then, by changing arm bands the guard will become other African American students for scenes 4 and 5 (a boy or girl depending on casting).

EXTRAS -- Extras can easily be added into the scenes with mobs. Feel free to add to the core cast.

PROPS & COSTUMES

Can be anything to help establish character such as...

Notepad-----Protest sign-----Ruler-----Notebook

Black T-Shirt or arm band for Black students. You can also have a sign or name tag that shows Black. This will help the audience know who is a minority character.

Sunglasses for Elizabeth in Scene 2

SLIDESHOW:

A powerpoint slideshow is used as a backdrop for the play. The slides contain photos and a timeline to orient the audience to what is taking place.

PRESHOW

(Show Slide #1)

SCENE ONE

(Exterior – Steps of the State Capital of Arkansas. Show Slide #2 -- ORVAL FAUBUS standing on the stairs in center stage. FAUBUS turns to a crowd of reporters standing in front of him – use MOB characters or extras for this crowd.)

FAUBUS

I do not mean, and have had no intention of, challenging the federal union but the maintenance of the peace and order of a community is paramount to other considerations ... I have found it necessary, in order to preserve the peace and order of the community and to protect the lives – even of the Negro students and the negro people, to take the actions which I did.

(FAUBUS walks away from the reporters, spotlight pans to a REPORTER standing facing the audience and speaking as if to a camera.)

REPORTER

Ladies and gentlemen that was Governor Orval Faubus of the State of Arkansas announcing to the U.S. that he will employ the National Guard to stop Central High School from integrating. Will State or Federal law prevail? Will the nine Negro students who are being called the ‘Little Rock Nine’ be able to attend school? Time will tell.

(REPORTER exits stage.)

SCENE TWO

(Exterior – in front of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas on a fall day. Show Slide #3 -- ELIZABETH in a crowd. A single REPORTER stands upstage right amidst a MOB of people; the people are silently pantomiming their protest as the REPORTER faces the audience and speaks as if to a camera. A lone GUARD stands downstage, standing at attention. The MOB should improvise physically and verbally to convey the energy of an angry mob.)

MOB

We don't want them here!

HAZEL

Yeah! They got their own schools to go to; they don't need to go to ours.

MOB

It ain't right! Integration is communism!

(MOB is quiet but continues to pantomime anger and outrage. Spotlight pans to REPORTER as the MOB freezes...they should still be visibly angry.)

REPORTER

Good morning! On this day, September 4th 1957 I am standing outside Central High School in Little Rock Arkansas surrounded by an angry mob of students, parents and community members. The National Guard, ordered by Governor Orval Faubus, is present and is going to prevent the ‘Little Rock Nine’ students from attending school today. This is in direct opposition to Federal District Court Judge Ronald Davies order for Central High School to integrate. There is still no

sign of any of the students....wait....the city bus has just stopped and a female student, I believe it is Elizabeth Eckford, has stepped out. She is now walking towards the school...it looks as though she is going to try to cross the line of National Guardsmen.

MOB

(turns to face ELIZABETH)

There's one of them now.....

(ELIZABETH enters stage left. She is wearing big sunglasses to cover her eyes and holding a book close to her chest. The MOB immediately moves towards ELIZABETH and can be heard yelling and chanting.)

MOB AND HAZEL

“Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate!”

HAZEL

Go back to Africa!

(MOB freezes in tableaux again, this time angry and mean...the uglier, the angrier, the better. ELIZABETH moves through the mob and HAZEL follows her and is louder and meaner than all the other mob members. ELIZABETH's steps are slow and measured. She keeps her composure and walks right up to the GUARD without reacting to the crowd.)

GUARD

(breaks from stiff attention, and turns toward ELIZABETH)

You will not get in here!

(ELIZABETH turns and decides to go back to the bus stop and walks calmly and methodically to stage left. The MOB continues to shout but stays more to stage right, near the GUARD. One member of the MOB walks up to ELIZABETH and spits on her and then falls back into the crowd. REPORTER crosses to ELIZABETH and turns angrily toward the MOB).

REPORTER

Can't you see this is just a child?

(REPORTER comes closer to ELIZABETH, wipes the spit off her and puts a hand on her shoulder as she stands waiting for the bus)

REPORTER

Don't let them see you cry.

SCENE THREE

(Interior -- Central High School hallway, Monday, September 23rd 1957. Show Slide #4 -- MOB outside Central High. The students attempt their first day of school. A crowd is outside and the police are afraid they can no longer hold the mob back. Scene begins in the hallway of Little Rock High School. HAZEL and MOB are in the hallway of the school. REPORTER stands to the side of the stage and faces the audience. Spotlight is on the REPORTER.)

REPORTER

Today, September 23rd 1957 a full 19 days after the initial attempt of the Little Rock Nine to attend school...the police have escorted the students into the building and are now responsible for protecting them. A crowd is forming outside of Central High School. It is much larger than before....

(Voice fades out and spotlight turns to the MOB in the hallway.)

MOB

Did you see the crowd this morning?

HAZEL

There must be over a 1000 people out there in front of our school!

MOB

Yeah! Even the cops look scared! Things could get real bad here if that mob gets in.

(ELIZABETH enters the hallway)

MOB

Oh my God! They are in the school! I'm getting out of here.

(MOB turns and runs off stage as GUARD enters. HAZEL starts to run, but stops, turns and watches as the GUARD enters and turns to ELIZABETH)

GUARD

Miss, we need to get you out of here. It's not safe for you anymore. The mob is getting out of control and one Negro reporter has already been beaten. Get down low and crawl towards the basement. Stay clear of the windows. We have a car waiting.

(As HAZEL watches, ELIZABETH gets on her hands and knees; the GUARD leans over her with his hand holding her head down protectively, and they crawl towards the end of the stage.)

GUARD

Now get in the car, keep your head down, and stay down, until I say we are clear!

(GUARD and ELIZABETH exit; HAZEL turns to the audience.)

HAZEL:

I watched Elizabeth leave and I couldn't help but feel sorry for her. Some of the white students jumped out of the windows as a form of protest. I started thinking about Elizabeth and what she was going through....

(voice fades...)

SCENE FOUR

(Interior -- Central High School Library. October, 1957. Show Slide #5 -- Students are seated in chairs a semi-circle center stage. MINNIJEAN/TERRENCE and ELIZABETH are stage left, REPORTER is in the middle and HAZEL and one MOB character are on the other side. Spotlight pans to REPORTER.)

REPORTER

Good evening. It is now October 20th 1957. It has been a little over a month since the protests outside Central High School in Little Rock Arkansas. We are here today at the Central High School Library to have a conversation with some Central High School students about their feelings about integration. With us are Elizabeth Eckford, Minnijean/Terrence (*depending on boy or girl casting*), Hazel Brown and Sammy Parker. We thought it would be important to hear from the students what their perspectives are on the ongoing situation.

MOB

Why do Negro students have to integrate in the first place?

HAZEL

They have schools of their own don't they?

ELIZABETH

What is it you have against black people? Why do you hate us?

HAZEL

I don't hate you.

ELIZABETH

Dislike then.

HAZEL

I don't dislike you either.

REPORTER

Do you think there are other ways to work this out besides protest?

MOB

No I don't because the South has historically always been against racial mixing. I think they will fight this thing to the end. We fight for our freedom! That's one thing. And we don't have any freedom anymore.

TERRENCE/MINNIJEAN

Freedom? It seems that we are the ones having to fight for our freedom.

MOB

What do you call having soldiers around escorting you into the school. That isn't freedom. They tried to keep you safe, not to force this down our throats.

ELIZABETH

They weren't really protecting me when I showed up to school. No one broke up the mob there.

HAZEL

I feel guilty about the way we acted that day. I felt ashamed. We should be treating others the way we want to be treated. We didn't treat Elizabeth very well at all.

REPORTER

Have you ever really made an effort to try and find out what black people were like?

HAZEL

Not 'till today.

REPORTER

What do you think about them after today?

HAZEL

I came here today thinking that I wasn't going to change my mind. That I was against integration and that blacks weren't equal...but I don't know they seem like they are. They have their own feelings and thoughts just like us.

REPORTER

What do you think your parents will say to that?

HAZEL

I think I am going to have to have a long talk with my parents.

(The scene freezes again in tableaux. HAZEL and ELIZABETH look at each other with a mutual respect and REPORTER steps out of the tableaux.)

SCENE FIVE

(Interior -- Hallways of Central High School. Show Slide #6 - Mixed students in a class. MINNIJEAN/TERRANCE stands in the hallway facing the audience.)

MINNIJEAN/TERRANCE

That day in the library when we were all sitting around talking together, people were on their best behavior. But life at Central High was not easy for any of us. A few of the white students tried talking to us, but over time those few souls were crushed in the machinery set up by segregationists to separate us, to torture us physically and mentally until we left school. Every day at Central High we had to keep a “high level of vigilance” for our own safety. Every moment of our lives outside of adult supervision we lived in fear and tried to focus on survival. You would be surprised what people will do when they believe that they won’t ever get caught or be held accountable. Even the adults that supervised would turn their backs to us and hide behind their own prejudices or lack of courage. We were on our own.

(MINNIJEAN/TERRANCE moves off stage. ELIZABETH enters and is working the combination of her locker. MOB and HAZEL walk in and MOB pushes her hard as they walk by. HAZEL watches on eagerly and cheers on the event. TEACHER is standing nearby and turns away)

ELIZABETH

Teacher.....did you see that?

TEACHER

You’re not that badly hurt are you?

ELIZABETH

Aren’t you going to do anything? S/he just pushed me into my locker!

TEACHER

I didn’t see it happen so I can’t just take your word for it. You know the principal’s rule. You can’t make a report unless a teacher sees it.

(All actors but MINNIJEAN/TERRANCE leave the stage – MINNIJEAN/TERRANCE faces audience.)

MINNIJEAN/TERRANCE

Teachers were either no help at all or some teachers were a part of the problem. A few teachers had a hard time just being around us. Like they had never seen a black person in their life....

(TEACHER walks by and MINNIJEAN/TERRANCE stops her, attempting to hand her a paper.)

Teacher! I finished the final draft of my history project. Here.

(TEACHER reaches out and his/her hand stops and is quickly retracted to avoid accidental contact, as if the teacher thinks they will become infected.)

TEACHER

Here. Go ahead and set that on this book.

(TEACHER holds out a book for MINNIJEAN/TERRENCE to set her/his paper on. MINNIJEAN/TERRENCE sets the paper on the book, then teacher exits the stage. MINNIJEAN/TERRENCE turns to audience.)

MINNIJEAN/TERRENCE

You see? I was almost invisible at that school. I had to pinch myself to know that I was awake. I'd go home to my Mom and tell her about what had happened at school that day and Mom would tell me that what we were doing was not just for ourselves but for generations to come. Me? I got to go through and live my life in fear for the next generation.

(REPORTER enters center stage and turns to audience.)

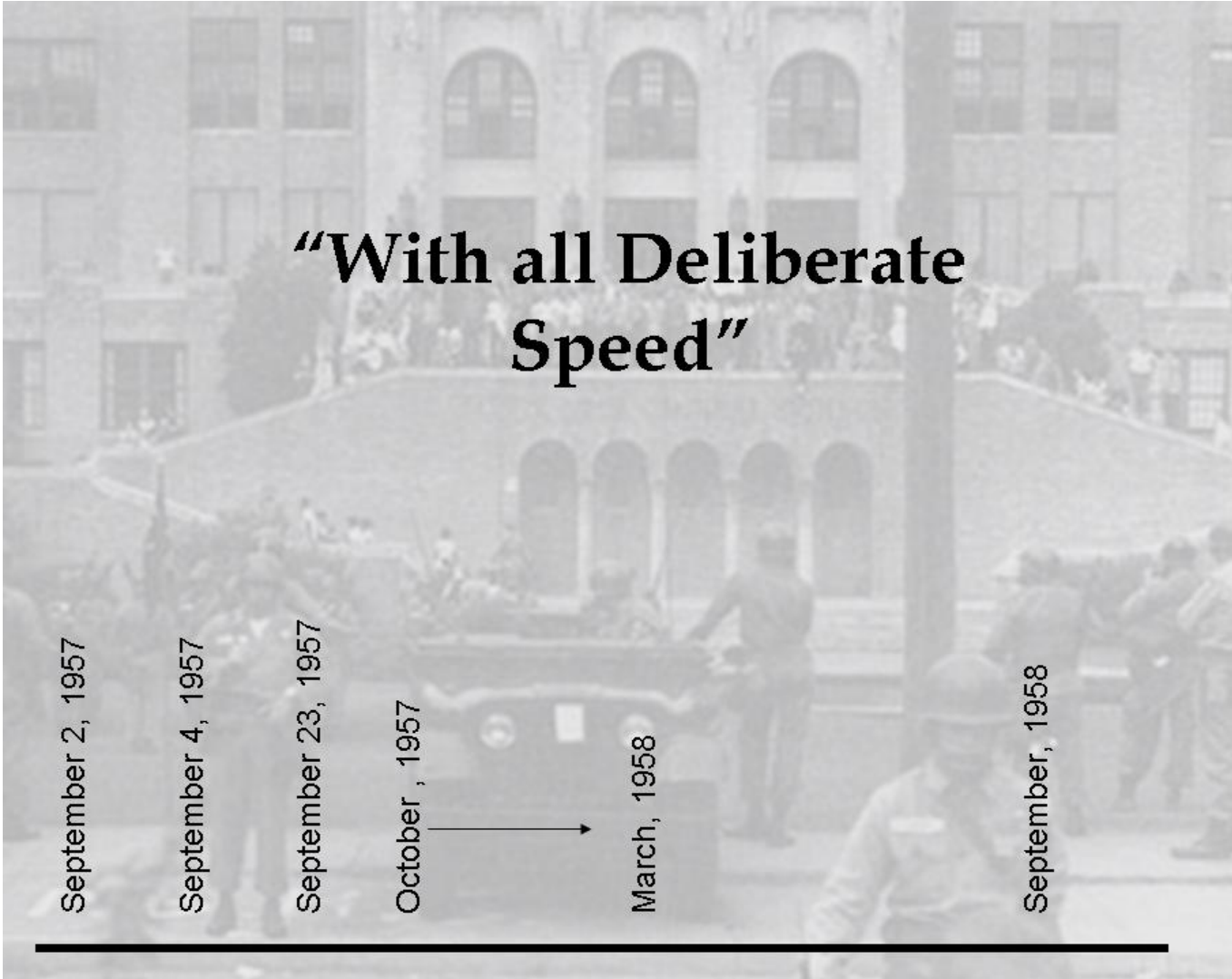
REPORTER

Hazel, the poster child for Southern white anger towards integration had a change of mind and heart. She did have that talk with her parents, but her parents and her family did not change their mindset at all. She would live the rest of her life ostracized from her own family. It was one of the prices paid in the lives of people who lived through the integration of Central High School. The school would later be closed the following year and re-assigned to become a private school, returning it to an all-white status. However, the example that was led by the Little Rock Nine would open the door for the integration of many schools across the country. That is how social change works, one heart and mind at a time. The nine students that attended Central High School would go on to lead successful lives, becoming doctors, getting married, getting involved in community activism, and each has their own account to tell of how they survived the experience.

(Show Slide #7 - Epilogue and Slide #8 until the text rolls.)

SOURCE MATERIAL:

1. Integration: Central Students Talk it out "New York Times", October 20, 1957
2. One of the 'Little Rock Nine' Looks back, NPR Day to Day September 4, 2007
3. "Eckford: Central High in 1957 'was not...a normal environment'" CNN Kevin Drew. May 17, 2004.
4. "Every Person has a Story of Courage" Lesson six of National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior resources for teachers.



September 2, 1957

September 4, 1957

September 23, 1957

October, 1957

March, 1958

September, 1958





Slide 4



September 2, 1957

September 4, 1957

September 23, 1957

October, 1957

March, 1958

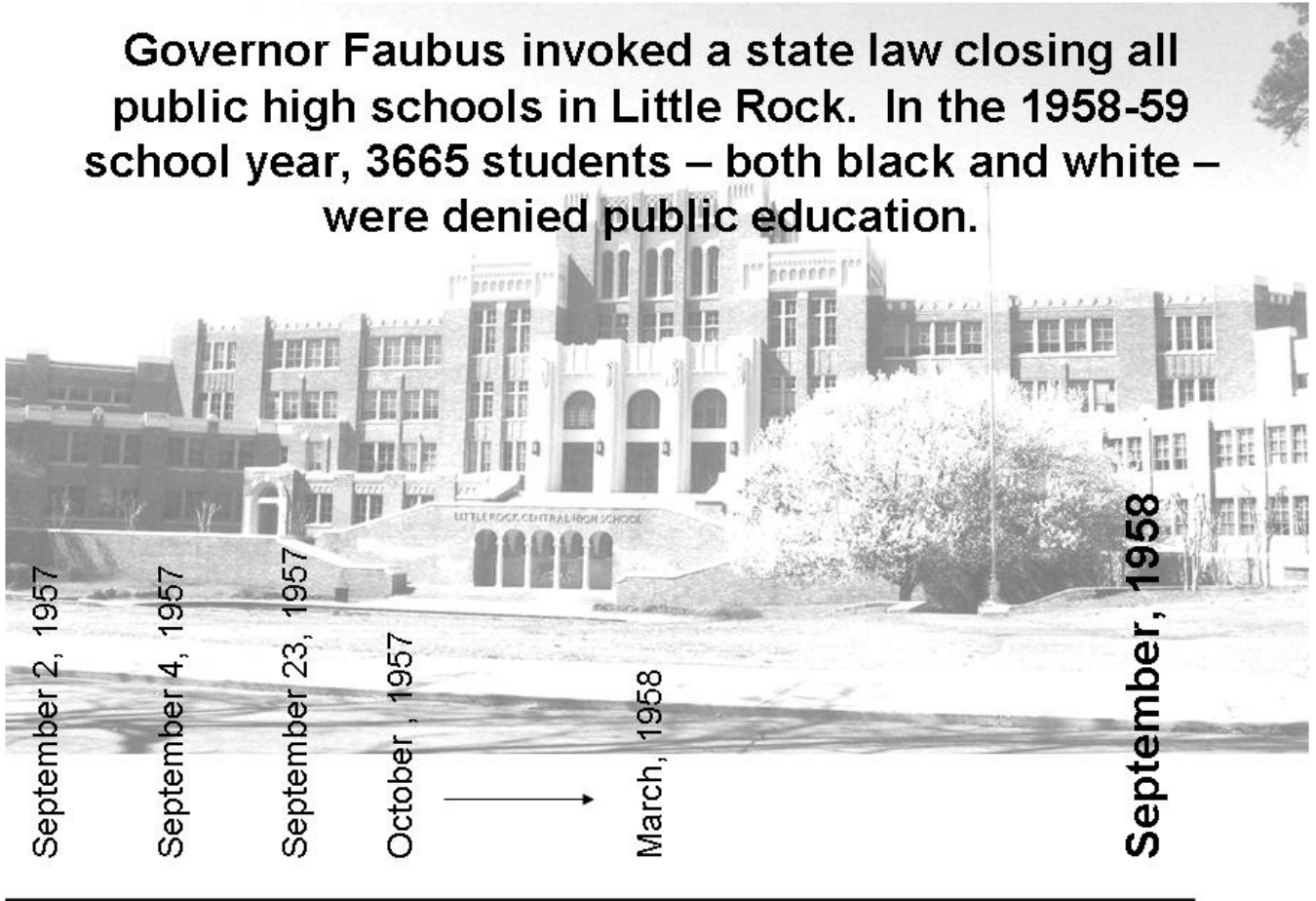
September, 1958

Slide 5





Governor Faubus invoked a state law closing all public high schools in Little Rock. In the 1958-59 school year, 3665 students – both black and white – were denied public education.



Slide 8

**Ernest Green - Graduated from Central High School 1958.
Senior Director at an investment banking firm.**

**Carlotta Walls - Graduated from Central High School 1960.
YWCA program administrator for teens.**

**Jefferson Thomas - Graduated from Central High School 1960.
Accountant for US Department of Defense.**

**Gloria Ray - Graduated from Kansas City High School 1960.
Teacher and technical writer.**

**Elizabeth Eckford - Went straight to Knox College after
correspondence courses. Served in the US Army.**

**Thelma Mothershed - received diploma from Central High
School via mail 1960. Taught Home economics for 28 years.**

