



FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

WACHMAN CENTER

**CLASSROOM LESSONS:**

**THE MILITARY IN U.S. DOMESTIC HISTORY**

**IN THEIR BOOTS: THE 101<sup>st</sup> AIRBORNE, THE NATIONAL GUARD AND THE  
INTEGRATION OF CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL**

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**NYS SS Standard 1- History of the United States**

**Essential Questions:**

What was life like for the soldiers who were federalized by President Eisenhower and helped integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas?

What was the role of the National Guard in integrating Central High?

**Assessment:**

Students will complete document assessments, and create a first-person narrative describing life for a soldier escort of the Little Rock Nine.

**Materials:**

Task, Directions and Historical Context page

Documents (images, text "President Sends Troops to Little Rock...")

Document Assessment forms

Elizabeth Eckford Image

**Review, Preview, Connections:**

This lesson certainly fits into the broader context of the Civil Rights Movement of the Post-WWII era.

Students should already know about Brown vs. BOE, Topeka, KS

Students may be aware of Plessy vs. Ferguson, as well as other elements of the Civil Rights struggle. Foreknowledge of the Jackie Robinson experience would also be helpful.

**Teacher Presentation:**

The teacher should go over the connections, as well as the Historical Context and Task.

The class should read and discuss the New York Times Article announcing Eisenhower's decision to federalize the Arkansas National Guard, etc.

The teacher may review the documents at his/her discretion.

Student experience with Primary Sources may dictate how much self-directed work is done.

**Work Time:**

Review directions and NY Times article.

Ask for questions. Turn students loose to work independently.

Students should review at least 3 different images and complete Document Assessment study guides.

Students should be provided enough time to complete the first-person narrative.

This may be assigned as homework, or students may be given a class period to complete this task.

1-3 Class Days anticipated.

**Closure:**

Students may present their first-person narratives to the class.

**Learning Extensions:**

Research actual participants in this incident (Little Rock Nine, Governor Faubus, Eisenhower).

Research other integration experiences (James Meredith, Ruby Bridges, etc.)

**Task:** Students will review the Historical Context, an article from the New York Times, and images from the Little Rock Nine's efforts to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Students will use information from these sources, as well as their knowledge of social studies and history to craft a well-written first person narrative from the perspective of a National Guardsman assigned duty by President Eisenhower to enforce the integration order. This first person narrative

may be in the form of a story, a letter, a journal entry, interview or some other format approved by the teacher.

**Method:** 1. Review the Historical Context below.

2. Read the New York Times article "President Sends Troops to Little Rock, Federalizes Arkansas National Guard; Tells Nation He Acted to Avoid An Anarchy" from September 24, 1957. Complete the reading/discussion questions.

3. Study the assigned images and complete the image study guides.

4. Write a well-crafted first person account from the perspective of a National Guardsman who has been assigned duty to help integrate Central High School. Account may be in the form of a story, journal or diary entry, interview, or some other format.

**Historical Context:**

In May 1954, The United States Supreme Court, in deciding *Brown v. Board of Education (Of Topeka Kansas)*, ruled that schools must desegregate "with all deliberate speed." This decision overturned the doctrine of "separate but equal" which had been in effect since 1896. So as to not violate the 14th Amendment, an adjustment to the Constitution that, among other things guaranteed equality regardless of race, the Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)* that so long as material conditions were equal, separation of the races was permissible. *Brown* challenged this doctrine as it pertained to schools. Among the many reasons for the unanimous opinion to desegregate schools in the South is that segregation made children feel inferior to white kids, something that impeded their (black kids') ability to learn. Beyond how segregation made the children feel was the issue of having an informed citizenry, something for which education is crucial.

Why did the Governor of Arkansas refuse to integrate Central High School in September of 1957- four years after *Brown*? It's simple: he wanted to get re-elected. Governor Faubus followed the lead of other states in the South at the time, states that refused to allow black students to attend school with whites. In what has come to be known as "Massive Resistance," local and state politicians initially passed laws to resist the Court decision in *Brown* that ordered schools to be desegregated throughout the South. These laws were passed because many white southerners had, through the years, become accustomed to their children attending school with other white kids. Why did they choose not to wish their kids

attend school with black kids? Well, for some, they thought their kids too good to attend school with a race of people they believed inferior, and for others, it was simply a matter of custom. Hence, they refused to comply with the Supreme Court's order. This refusal violated federal law, the law of the land. And since federal law takes precedence over local and state law, in his role as Commander-in-Chief, President Eisenhower took over the state's National Guard units. He did so to force compliance with the law of the land.

- Christopher Parker (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 2001) Department of Political Science U. of Washington

## **President Sends Troops to Little Rock, Federalizes Arkansas National Guard; Tells Nation He Acted to Avoid An Anarchy**

### **Eisenhower on Air Says School Defiance Has Gravely Harmed Prestige of U.S. President Warns of Anarchy Peril**

By ANTHONY LEWIS

Special to The New York Times

Washington, Sept. 24--President Eisenhower sent Federal troops to Little Rock, Ark., today to open the way for the admission of nine Negro pupils to Central High School.

Earlier, the President federalized the Arkansas National Guard and authorized calling the Guard and regular Federal forces to remove obstructions to justice in Little Rock school integration.

His history-making action was based on a formal finding that his "cease and desist" proclamation, issued last night, had not been obeyed. Mobs of pro-segregationists still gathered in the vicinity of Central High School this morning.

Tonight, from the White House, President Eisenhower told the nation in a speech for radio and television that he had acted to prevent "mob rule" and "anarchy."

### **Historic Decision**

The President's decision to send troops to Little Rock was reached at his vacation headquarters in Newport, R.I. It was one of historic importance politically, socially, constitutionally. For the first time since the Reconstruction days that followed the

Civil War, the Federal Government was using its ultimate power to compel equal treatment of the Negro in the South.

He said violent defiance of Federal Court orders in Little Rock had done grave harm to "the prestige and influence, and indeed to the safety, of our nation and the world." He called on the people of Arkansas and the South to "preserve and respect the law even when they disagree with it."

### **Guardsmen Withdrawn**

Action quickly followed the President's orders. During the day and night 1,000 members of the 101st Airborne Division were flown to Little Rock. Charles E. Wilson, Secretary of Defense, ordered into Federal service all 10,000 members of the Arkansas National Guard.

Today's events were the climax of three weeks of skirmishing between the Federal Government and Gov. Orval E. Faubus of Arkansas. It was three weeks ago this morning that the Governor first ordered National Guard troops to Central High School to preserve order. The nine Negro students were prevented from entering the school.

The Guardsmen were gone yesterday, withdrawn by Governor Faubus as the result of a Federal Court order. But a shrieking mob compelled the nine children to withdraw from the school.

President Eisenhower yesterday cleared the way for full use of his powers with a proclamation commanding the mob in Little Rock to "disperse."

At 12:22 P.M. today in Newport the President signed a second proclamation. It said first that yesterday's command had "not been obeyed and willful obstruction of said court orders exists and threatens to continue."

The proclamation then directed Charles E. Wilson, Secretary of Defense, to take all necessary steps to enforce the court orders for admission of the Negro children, including the call of any or all Arkansas Guardsmen under Federal command and the use of the armed forces of the United States.

**New York Times - President Sends Troops to Little Rock. . .**  
**Discussion Questions**

1. Why did Eisenhower feel he had to order the National Guard to act in Little Rock?
2. Which troops were ordered into immediate action? How many?
3. What had Arkansas Governor Faubus originally ordered the Guard to do, before Eisenhower's Order?
4. Why was this decision controversial?
5. What Supreme Court Decision made this action necessary?
6. Could order have been restored without Eisenhower's action? Could Central High School have been integrated any other way?
7. Given that the troops were Arkansas National Guardsmen, how do you think the people of Little Rock felt about them and acted towards them?

**Image Study Guides**

Study your assigned image(s). Answer the questions below.

Describe everything you see in the image (be thorough):

What people do you see in the image? How many men? How many women? How many soldiers? How many civilians? How many blacks? How many whites?

Describe the emotions you see people exhibiting. Who is exhibiting these emotions?

Describe the actions you see. What are people doing? Who is doing what?