

EXAMINING LAWS THAT PERMIT RACIAL SEGREGATION



ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What types of racial stereotypes have been perpetuated by the media and how have they changed over time?
- How do media portrayals of race influence our attitudes in conscious and unconscious ways?



OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Examine and analyze the Dred Scott v. F.A. Sanford case to begin to unravel the foundations for anti-Black sentiment in the United States.
- Discuss the implications of judicial rulings on society and groups of people.
- Write a 1-page essay detailing the importance of this court case. The focus questions should be: What is the significance of this case? What societal impacts did this case have and how does it present itself in present-day interactions? Explain the impact of this case on citizenship in this country over time.
- Use evidence from texts to add context to points stated or written.



LEARNING STANDARDS

See the [standards alignment chart](#) to learn how this lesson supports New Jersey State Standards.



TIME NEEDED

75–90 minutes



MATERIALS

- Teacher Edition—Vocabulary Planning and Definitions
- [Dred Scott v F.A. Sanford Case article](#)
- [The Judicial Branch article](#)
- Dred Scott Decision Media Images
- [Jigsaw explanation article](#)



VOCABULARY

CONTENT

Judicial Branch
Legislative Branch
Executive Branch
Supreme Court
Commander-in-Chief
Abolitionist
Policies

Territory
Missouri Compromise
Whiteness
Assimilate
Ruling
Confirmed/Confirmation
Society

ACADEMIC

Examine
Collaborative Discussion
Analyze
Annotate
Implication
Delineate
Argument

PART 1

Introduction (20 min): Knowledge Building

1 Say: We will begin this lesson with a jigsaw activity to outline the responsibilities of the judicial branch of government. Does anyone know what I mean when I say the judicial branch of government? (Allow for responses.) The U.S. government operates through 3 systems where one checks the other, so no one group of leaders has too much ruling authority. Those 3 branches or sections are the legislative, which consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate, which together form the United States Congress; the executive branch, which is vested in the president of the United States, who also acts as head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces; and finally, the Judicial branch. The executive and legislative branches are elected by the people, but members of the judicial branch are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. These are the people who operate as Supreme Court justices (or other federal judges) of the United States. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the Nation for all cases and controversies arising under the Constitution or the laws of the United States. It is the final arbiter of the law, and functions as guardian and interpreter of the Constitution.

2 Say: In a jigsaw activity, you are broken into learning groups where you become the expert for very specific information. In this instance, you will separate into 3 groups to each read a different part of an article on the judicial branch. Later, as a group, you will present the information you learn to your classmates. We call it a jigsaw because we look at the information like a jigsaw puzzle, with each section representing a different piece of the puzzle. When we present our findings, we are putting the puzzle back together. Be sure to choose the following roles for your group: a recorder to capture notes, a presenter to speak on behalf of the group, and discussers to choose details that are important and pose questions to the group.

→ **Jigsaw Reading:** [The Judicial Branch \(12 min\)](#)

→ Use this website text for the jigsaw activity, breaking this page into 3 sections. Place students into 3 groups and assign each group one of the sections to read.

- The goal is for students to be able to present information to their peers detailing or highlighting points from their reading.
- Students will focus on the following questions: What is the central idea of your section? Why is this important?

3 **Video: The Abolitionist: What was the Dred Scott Decision?:** <https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/arct14.soc.amex-abodre/the-abolitionists-the-dred-scott-decision/> (8 min)

Say: For this lesson, we will be learning about an important court case that made its way to the Supreme Court of the United States. The 1857 ruling involving Dred Scott, a formerly enslaved man, left the country with many questions about the rights of formerly enslaved people, those who were currently enslaved, and those who would be born into enslavement or freedom. We will watch a quick clip about the case. While you are watching, I want you to focus on the questions:

- *What was the Dred Scott decision?*
- *How did this impact society during this time?*

4 When students are done watching the video clip, allow them to record their responses to prepare for paired discussions with a partner. Students will be given 3 minutes to share their responses with a partner and record any new information they received from the conversation.

PART 2 Content Analysis (40 min)

5 *Say: Let's keep building knowledge surrounding this case. We have a baseline understanding of how the government works and makes decisions in the United States, and we have an idea of what the Dred Scott decision was all about, but what were the events that led up to this? What was the country's stance on slavery during that time? Now we will watch another short clip about the Missouri Compromise of 1820, another important decision made by Congress, that would shift the tone and policies of the United States.*

- ### 6 *As you watch the video, focus on all of the following questions:*
- *What was the Missouri Compromise?*
 - *How might this impact Dred Scott, who was taken to a Union territory after this decision?*
 - *What benefits did the Missouri Compromise have for the North and the South?*

→ What evidence could be used to further prove that Dred Scott could be legally free from slavery?

7

Video: What was the Missouri Compromise:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68gj3C0A9Fo>

8

When students are done watching the video and answering questions, they will engage in a discussion protocol to continue building knowledge. Students will use the strategy of Silent Discussion, (explanation here: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/discussion-protocols-engage-all-students> where they respond to a prompt on a piece of paper, then pass the paper to the right for another classmate to read and respond to their writing. Students will respond using the following questions:

- Do you agree with the statement? Why?
- Do you disagree with the statement? Why?
- What details can you add?

Allow students to record responses after the video and explain the Silent Discussion Protocol to students. Students will be responding to one prompt: What evidence could be used to further prove that Dred Scott could be legally free from slavery? Allow for students to undergo two rounds (pass the paper to two students) before they have their paper returned. Allocate 2 minutes for students to read the responses and capture any additional notes.

9

Say: We are going to keep building knowledge of this topic and read some background information on the Dred Scott decision. What do we know thus far? (An enslaved man went to court to argue for his freedom, the Supreme Court is the final decision maker of this case, the judicial system is where the Supreme Court justices (judges) serve as upholders of the U.S. Constitution, Illinois was considered a free territory at the time Dred Scott's owner died, states decided whether slavery was legal or not based on the Missouri Compromise, etc.) Let's deepen our knowledge and read some background information about the case. You will have 15 minutes to read and annotate this document for evidence based on the following question: What evidence could be used to further prove that Dred Scott could (or could not) be legally free from slavery?

10

Read The Reaction to the Dred Scott Case “Background” Section, on pages 2-5 in the article. Allow students 15 minutes to highlight evidence in the text. When they are done highlighting, ask students to discuss the question as well as their responses, using the evidence that they highlighted in the text. (5 minutes)

11 Say: *It's important to note that different states had different responses to this decision. There were many protests for continued enslavement, as there were for advocating freedom. One important factor to note is how the media, at the time newspapers, reported this story. Media outlets tend to report information through the lens of their beliefs. Where a conservative person gets their news or information from may be drastically different than someone who is liberal.*

12 Show students the images of news clips from newspapers reporting on the Dred Scott case and ask them: What do you notice? How would these clips influence the reader?

PART 3

Writing (30 min)

13 Say: *We learned a lot of new information about the Dred Scott decision, and we saw how the media, at that time newspaper journalists, fanned the flames between both the North and the South. Not much has changed in the formula media outlets use to share information. It is shared in a way that will gain attention, be shared multiple times, and, in this new context, gain views, clicks, and likes. The bigger impact that this case had was on citizenship in this country and the messaging that was given to immigrants as they entered the U.S. Many other ethnic groups immigrated to the United States in the following decades. They were treated as non-citizens and, in most instances, with hate and contempt. To establish their grounding in the U.S., they had to prove their whiteness or their proximity to whiteness to be accepted, often adopting anti-Black sentiments to be assimilated into whiteness.*

14 As critical thinkers and changemakers, I invite you to write a 1-page essay answering the following question:

- What is the significance of the Dred Scott case? What role did the media play in creating/maintaining stereotypes about Black people? What societal impacts did this case have and how does it present itself in the present day?
- Bonus: How does the Dred Scott case connect to how Southern states began creating laws during and after this time period due to state's rights?

PART 4

Share/Closing (5 min)

15 Invite 1–2 students to share highlights from their writing focusing on the impact this case has on them and their journey to the U.S. (if applicable) or the journey of their ancestors towards citizenship in the U.S.



Teacher Edition: Vocabulary Definitions

This document is meant to serve to build teacher knowledge and capacity. Please use the following document to know and understand the vocabulary for this lesson. Review and define these terms before teaching your lesson to help better understand and frame the content. There is also space to add any context necessary for your students.

Word	Definition	Teacher Notes/Context
CONTENT VOCABULARY		
Judicial branch		
Legislative branch		
Executive branch		
Supreme Court		
Commander in Chief		
Abolitionist		
Policies		
Territories		
Missouri Compromise		
Whiteness		

CONTINUED →



Teacher Edition: Vocabulary Definitions

Word	Definition	Teacher Notes/Context
Assimilation		
Ruling		
Confirm/Confirmation		
Society		

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

Examine		
Collaborative Discussions		
Analyze		
Annotate		
Implications		
Delineate		
Argument		



Dred Scott Decision Media Images

The Dred Scott Decision to Present Day: The Impact on Present Day Citizenship



Vineyard Gazette reporting on the Dred Scott Decision



Local Newspaper featuring the Scott family



Dred Scott Decision Media Images

The Dred Scott Decision to Present Day: The Impact on Present Day Citizenship



Newspaper Clip detailing the Supreme Court Decision and Protests that occurred as a result.



NY Times Obituary on Dred Scott



Dred Scott Decision Media Images

The Dred Scott Decision to Present Day: The Impact on Present Day Citizenship

What tone can you identify? How does the imagery and font support the tone?

EXTENDED THINKING: What's the impact of the Dred Scott Decision on Citizenship in the United States?

VIDEO

In this video, we'll learn about the US Supreme Court decision in Scott vs Sanford, handed down in 1857. The case ultimately rejected the idea that Black people could be citizens of the United States, and this helped entrench the institution of slavery, denied a host of rights to a huge number of people (both enslaved and free), and increased the tensions between abolitionists and enslavers."

[The Dred Scott Decision: Crash Course Black American History #16](#)

THEME 1

THEME 2

THEME 3

How does racial bias in the media and news coverage impact real-life policies and practices that affect the lives of African Americans? How can we develop the ability to critically question representations of race in the media we consume?

“Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

—James Baldwin

News coverage in the United States seems to consist of a specific formula; sensationalizing politics, marketing of products for consumer interest, and racial bias in the representation and the ways in which people of color are presented. Coverage of the war in Ukraine exposes the bias of one reporter, Charlie D’Agata, a CBS correspondent in Kyiv, who was quoted while covering the war efforts as saying, “This isn’t a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan...You know this is a relatively civilized, relatively European (society) —I have to choose those words carefully...” (Hellyer, *Coverage of Ukraine has exposed long-standing racist biases in Western media*. 2022). The impact of these statements is dangerous in that they minimize war-ravaged countries that consist of people of color and place people of European descent in a more humane light. This can have major implications for the type of support and aid that these countries receive globally, and it can

create a lack of empathy for countries that are not European by minimizing the events and damage that war has on their country and its people.

In Theme 2, the Impact of Media on Race, students explore how the news media and sources for news outlets (i.e., social media platforms) perpetuate racism through the stories that are told, the type of coverage that is dominant when speaking about communities of color and the communities and even government responses in supporting or policing communities of color.

Grades 3–5 will explore how Black people are represented in the media. They will examine images of different tv shows, news programming, and magazine images over time. They will also examine the types of programming that had Black representation and think about how those images represent or stereotype an entire group of people.

Students will end their lesson by writing about the impact of having accurate Black representation on tv and in films.

Middle school grades will examine the representation of people of color in the media. They will think critically about whose voice is being heard and how people of color are represented in news outlets and news media. This will allow them to develop an argument for how to increase the presence of people of color in the media. They will come to an understanding that while people of color are considered the global majority,¹ their lack of representation in front of and behind the camera is a testament to the inequitable conditions created in our society. In a 3–5-page essay, students will make a case for how to increase the presence of people of color in the media and why this is important to maintain a just and equitable society.

High school students will examine the societal impact and racist ideology on the lives of the Exonerated Five.² Students will watch clips from the movie “When They See Us,” view images, and read newspaper clippings (Bring Back the Death Penalty, Bring Back Our Police!, NY Daily News) from that time period. Students will examine how perception can dictate outcomes in the lives of innocent people, specifically people of color. They will also pay close attention to the language and framing that is used in media coverage and newspaper headlines. Students will then write a 1-page summary that analyzes the impact of media (news, movie, etc.) coverage on people of color, and address how they shape perceptions of different cultures of people of color.

1 Global Majority—a collective term that refers to people who are Black, Asian, brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or have been racialized as ethnic minorities.

2 The Exonerated Five—five Black and Latino youths (known as the Central Park Five, later the Exonerated Five) who were convicted of assaulting a woman and served sentences ranging from 6 to 12 years, but later had their charges vacated (dismissed) after a prison inmate confessed to the crime.