

**Keith Weldon
Medley**

About the author:

Mr. Medley was born in New Orleans and grew up in the Fabourg Marigny, nor far from where Homer Plessy lived. He attended St. Augustine High School and graduated from Southern University of New Orleans with a B.A. on sociology and psychology. Mr. Medley is a two-time recipient of publication grants from the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. *We as Freeman* is expanded from an article that he wrote for Smithsonian magazine.

Questions to consider cont'd

- ❖ How was the Louisiana Lottery Company tied to the politics of the Separate Car Act?
- ❖ Explain the political and philosophical reasoning behind “separate but equal.” Were the separate accommodations for African American and white citizens really “equal”? Why do you think they were or were not? Do you feel that, in some way, this philosophy is still being used today? If you do, how and why?
- ❖ The acts of civil disobedience by Rosa Parks, Homer Plessy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and many others came from a deep sense of what they felt was right, fair, equal, and humane treatment for people of their race. It was from this deep and abiding desire to be treated fairly and equally that they were able to work at making a difference in society. What individual liberty do you feel so strongly about that you would be willing to persevere as they did? Describe what it is, why you feel so strongly about it, and how far you might go to protect civil liberties for yourself and others.

- ❖ Explain the one-drop rule. How was this rule a factor in the book, *We as Freeman*?
- ❖ In the 1954 *Brown v. the Board of Education* lawsuit, parents’ simple desire for their daughter to be able to attend a neighborhood school triggered massive social change.
What other instances can you think of when a simple need or desire has resulted in such a drastic social change?
- ❖ In the late 1860’s, there was much more freedom for people of color. Adult males, regardless of ethnicity or previous condition of slavery, could vote by paying a \$1.50 poll tax, Louisiana became the only southern state to integrate schools in 1869, and in 1870 a Louisiana statute was removed that banned interracial marriage. Additionally, there were governors, senators, state representatives, and sheriffs who were black. But, by the dawn of the 1890’s, the political and social climate began to change - the Louisiana legislature voted on a law that separated people by race on streetcars. What, in your opinion, caused this change in the social and political climate? Back up your opinion with historic fact and precedent.

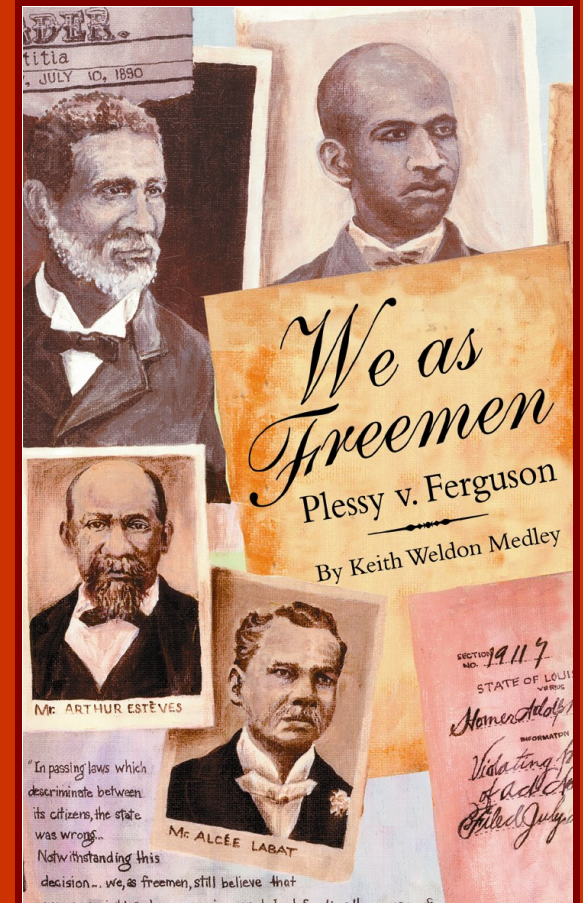
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Classroom Discussion Guide for
We as Freeman
Plessy v. Ferguson



By
Keith Weldon Medley

Classroom guide for *We as Freeman* *Plessy v. Ferguson*

Cross Curriculum Learning Experiences

Writing:

Think of a social issue that concerns you – one that you feel needs to be addressed by lawmakers. Draft a letter to your state representative about what you feel needs to be changed and why. Be sure to include any suggestions that you have about how the issue you are concerned about can be addressed and changed.

Read the article on p.165 of *We as Freeman* that appeared in the Times-Democrat after Judge Ferguson’s ruling on the Homer Plessy case. Write your response to this article and compare your response that of the Crusader.

As a class, think of a social issue that you feel needs to be changed so much that a constitutional amendment needs to be drafted. With your teacher’s help, draft such a proposal for this amendment.

Purpose:

- ❖ To show students how to organize their writing by importance, time, or sequence
- ❖ To have a better understanding of the process of how a constitutional amendment is conceptualized and promulgated
- ❖ To understand the concept of advocacy, and the importance of speaking up and taking action when a social condition seems unjust
- ❖ To improve written communication skills

Art:

Organize a poster display of a timeline of history during the Civil Rights movement.

On pp. 32-35 of *We as Freeman*, there is a detailed description of the New Orleans neighborhood where Homer Plessy and his wife lived. Read that and then make an aerial elevation map of the neighborhood. Mark the streets, houses, and other areas of interest on the map. When you are finished, compare your map to a current neighborhood map of the area. Note the street name changes and other changes in the area.

Purpose:

- ❖ To practice map reading and map drawing skills
- ❖ To gain knowledge about the ways man has changed, controlled, and directed his environment
- ❖ To gain an understanding of how and why neighborhoods developed as they did and how they develop today

Drama:

As a class, write a dialogue for the Supreme Court hearing concerning the Homer Plessy case. Assign parts for each Supreme Court justice. Read the description of each justice on pp. 194-198 to help the class understand the background and experience that may have influenced their thinking about this case.

After the dialogue is set, re-enact the deliberation that may have taken place between the justices. If such deliberation was held today, how would it be different?

Purpose:

- ❖ To understand the structure and function of the Supreme Court
- ❖ To understand the process of Supreme Court deliberations
- ❖ To enhance speaking skills
- ❖ To practice debating skills

Social Studies:

There have been many people through out history who have disagreed with the government, and they have voiced their disagreement through civil disobedience and passive resistance. Such historical figures include Mahatma Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Homer Plessy, to name just a few. Research at least two of these historical figures; then compare and contrast their social ideologies and the moral, and ethical foundations for their social activism.

Purpose:

- ❖ To understand how social and political beliefs can influence individual actions and how individual actions can influence social and political policies
- ❖ To understand the importance of social activism and influencing social change
- ❖ To understand the difference between violence and civil disobedience, activism, and advocacy

Technology:

Use your Internet search skills to research these topics:

Civil Rights Act of 1964
NAACP
Mahatma Gandhi (www.mkgandhi.org)
Rosa Parks
Malcolm X
Ida B. Wells-Barnett
13th, 14th and 15th amendments
Brown v. Board of Education
Jim Crow Laws
Apartheid (www.anc.org.za/people/mandela)
Railroad Boycott of 1914
Dred Scott Decision

** For the teacher**

Visit this Web site:

www.archives.state.al.us/teacher/rights/rights
Go to the links for “documents.” On these pages are links to original documents about Jim Crow laws. They can be printed out for classroom use and there are discussion questions for each document.

Questions to consider

- ❖ What do you feel is the role of fear in ethnic and race relations? Do you think that fear, felt by dominant groups, is directed especially toward the possibility that minority groups will not “stay in their place”? Why would you agree or disagree?
- ❖ Explain this statement: (*We as Freeman*, p. 202) “Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences, and to do so can only result in accentuating the difficulties of the present situation.”
- ❖ Do you feel that the court’s decision was giving states the constitutional protection and precedent they needed to isolate and discriminate against whole classes and races of people? Why or why not?
- ❖ What was a poll tax and how did this tax effect the ability of African Americans to vote? Do you feel that this was an overt act of discrimination? Why or why not?