

Inquiry Lesson: Is our Community Inclusive?

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Suggested Grade Level Range: 9-12

Connections to U.S. History Curriculum

This lesson situates local histories of integration within the broader context of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. By examining barriers to inclusion in Chicago, national integration efforts during the 1960s, and the specific case of Park Forest, Illinois, students engage with key themes such as housing discrimination, federal civil rights legislation, and grassroots activism. The lesson reinforces students' understanding of how national struggles for racial justice were experienced and contested at the local level, illuminating the enduring challenges of building inclusive communities in American democracy.

Local Context

Founded after World War II as one of the nation's first planned suburban communities, Park Forest, Illinois became a focal point for progress and tensions around racial integration. Initially developed as a planned suburb for WWII veterans and their families, the village became one of the first in the Chicago Southland to actively grapple with integration in housing and public life during the Civil Rights Movement. While some residents and leaders advocated for inclusive policies, others resisted change, mirroring broader patterns of white flight and systemic segregation in the Chicago region. Local efforts, including statements from civic leaders, interracial commissions, and community education campaigns, reflect the possibilities and limits of integration in mid-century suburban America.

Student Learning Objectives

- *Students will analyze historical sources and case studies related to housing, policy, and civic action during the Civil Rights Movement to evaluate the extent to which communities like Park Forest worked toward racial inclusion.*

Standards Addressed

- SS.9-12.IS.11. Use interdisciplinary lenses to identify local, regional, state, natural, or global concerns and anticipate the outcome possible solutions might have on all impacted communities, including marginalized communities.
- SS.9-12.H.3. Evaluate the methods used to promote change and the effects and outcomes of these methods on diverse groups of people.

Materials Used

- [Waldmann Drive Reference Photo](#) for Anticipatory Set
- [Park Forest City Profile on Racial Equity](#) for Informed Action

Sources for Supporting Question 1	Sources for Supporting Question 2	Sources for Supporting Question 3
• SQ1 Graphic Organizer for Formative Performance Task • Source A: Oral History Interview with Leona DeLue • Source B: Mapping Chicago's Racial Segregation, South Side Weekly • Source C: Chicago Housing Authority • Source D: Chicago Open Housing Campaign	• SQ2 T-Chart Worksheet • Source A: MLK, "The Future of Integration" (1966) • Source B: LBJ, "Remarks Upon Signing the Civil Rights Act" (1968) • Source C: Fair Housing Act (1968)	• SQ3 Municipal Committee Role Sheet • Source A: Norman Rockwell's "New Kid in the Neighborhood" (1967) • Source B: Statement by Mayor Dinerstein (1960) • Source C: Oral history by Bill Simpson (1980) • Source D: Village Instructions to Employees (1959)

Procedure

Anticipatory Set/ Staging the Compelling Question

- Set up the following scenario for students and have them use local knowledge or online yelp reviews (or other crowdsourced ratings) to reflect on the community in the present:
 - Your family is looking for a home in the Chicago Southland and you come across this Zillow listing at [325 Waldmann Drive](#). The house was originally built in 1955. You've been doing some research before the big purchase and asking local folks about the community. How would others describe Park Forest as a place to live? Does it have a reputation in the Chicago Southland?

Supporting Question/Activity 1: What were the barriers to inclusion in Chicago communities before/during the Civil Rights Era?

- Students should be given the following source set to complete the formative performance task for this supporting question: Identify and describe at least three specific barriers to inclusion in Chicago communities during the Civil Rights Era from the source material provided. Provide the [SQ1 graphic organizer](#) to help students organize their thoughts.
 - Source A: [Oral History](#), Leona DeLue
 - Source B: [Mapping Chicago's Racial Segregation, South Side Weekly](#)
 - Source C: [Chicago Housing Authority](#)
 - Source D: [Chicago Open Housing Campaign](#)
- Formative performance task: Using the graphic organizer, have students summarize their findings through an informal writing exercise.

Supporting Question/Activity 2: What were the national trends towards integration during the Civil Rights era?

- Students should be given the following source set to examine. As they read, they can fill out the [SQ2 t-chart](#) that will help support them to complete the formative task:
 - Source A: [MLK, "The Future of Integration"](#) (1966)
 - Source B: [LBJ, "Remarks Upon Signing the Civil Rights Act"](#) (1968)

- Source C: [Fair Housing Act](#) (1968)
- Formative performance task: Students response to the summary questions on the SQ2 T-Chart Worksheet.
 - How do the authors or speakers frame the need for integration?
 - How do policy and moral arguments for integration differ across the sources?

Supporting Question/Activity 3: How was integration effected locally in Park Forest, Illinois?

- Begin by asking students to reflect: “What does integration mean in practice?”
- Briefly introduce Park Forest as a planned suburb grappling with integration in the 1950s–60s (see local context).
- Project [Norman Rockwell’s “New Kids in the Neighborhood”](#) (image only and not the context yet) and facilitate a brief visual analysis.
 - What do you notice?
 - What emotions are captured?
 - How might this scene relate to Park Forest?
- Divide students into groups of 4. Assign each student one of the sources:
 - Source A: [Norman Rockwell’s “New Kid in the Neighborhood”](#) (1967)
 - Source B: [Statement by Mayor Dinerstein](#) (1960)
 - Source C: [Oral history by Bill Simpson](#) (1980)
 - Source D: [Village Instructions to Employees](#) (1959)
- Ask students to analyze their source for:
 - Tone and perspective on integration
 - Key arguments or points related to racial inclusion or exclusion
 - Historical context clues
- Students should complete the [Municipal Committee Role Sheet](#), identifying at least one argument for inclusivity based on their source.
- After the initial reading is complete, students will assume the role of a Park Forest resident serving on a municipal committee to encourage integration.
 - In small groups, they share their source-based perspectives and collaboratively draft a brief statement to the Village Board advocating for an inclusive policy.
 - Encourage students to debate priorities—e.g., housing, education, public services—and how best to address resistance.
- Whole class discussion after a few groups read their statement for the class:
 - How do local efforts complement or complicate national Civil Rights goals?

Assessment *(students have a choice to construct an argument or complete the extension activity for their summative assessment)*

- Construct an argument to answer the compelling question: Is our community inclusive?. Create a detailed outline, poster, essay that evaluates the need to study, remember, and/or celebrate this expedition using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views.

- Extension: Investigate a community group in Park Forest (a local school board, town council, etc). Attend a meeting or interview a member. From your report, assess the inclusivity of this community program, the participation rates among different demographic groups, and that institution's effectiveness in bridging gaps and fostering inclusivity. Does this institution live up to Park Forest's historical hope of integration?

Informed Action

- **UNDERSTAND** the findings of the 2016 report on [Park Forest City Profile on Racial Equity](#)
- **ASSESS** whether the historical efforts of the community have been successful to the present.
- **ACT** by creating an action plan to renew efforts towards an inclusive community in Park Forest and the surrounding Southland communities.