

"This is Michigan, Not Mississippi!" Grand Rapids Public Schools Integration and Busing

KC-8.2.III.F: Growing clashes between conservatives and liberals over social and cultural issues, the power of the federal government, race, and movements for greater individual rights.

KC-8.2.III.E Public confidence and trust in government's ability to solve social and economic problems declined.

Place in the Curriculum: I use this lesson after studying the urban uprisings in the late 1960s.

Objectives:

1. Students will contextualize persistent racial inequalities that continued throughout the civil rights era
2. Students will analyze GRPS's decision to close South High School and bus Black students to predominantly white high schools.

Note: This lesson builds off an [earlier lesson for APUSH unit 7](#) and [unit 8](#).

In the previous two lessons, students investigated whether the community of Grand Rapids lived up to the promises of the 14th Amendment and the 1885 Michigan Civil Rights Act)

In the [first lesson](#), students learned about the fight against Jim Crow in Grand Rapids in the 1920s (unit 7). Even though legal victory was achieved in that fight, students learned in the [second lesson](#) that discrimination persisted in Grand Rapids throughout the next several decades leading up to an uprising in the summer of 1967 (unit 8). Students considered if the uprising was justifiable by debating the legitimacy of the authority of Grand Rapids civil leaders and institutions.

However, this lesson can be used without students having all the background knowledge of the 1920s lesson.

BEFORE CLASS: Print this and post hang them on the walls around the classroom with even spacing. They should be posted in a big circle. Students will stand by one of their choice later in the lesson and will engage in a whole class discussion, standing in the spots around the large circle.

[Student Handout](#)

Lesson Plan

4 mins	Each student should pick up the handout as they walk into class. As they walk in, slide 1 is displayed on the board. I ask students to think about what the woman's signs might mean. "This is Michigan, not Mississippi" As the bell rings, I tell them she is protesting outside South High School on Hall Street. Black students had been kicked off of sports teams for having facial hair. This wasn't a GRPS rule, only a school rule in the city's only predominantly Black high school. (you can read more about this fascinating story when Grand Rapids made national Black news in the Jet Magazine story from November 24, 1966, p 18-25.) Introduction: Slide 2 In small groups: "Context: What do you recall about the experiences of Black citizens of Grand Rapids?" - Ask groups to share after a few minutes.
2 - 6 min	Slides 3-6 review images and main ideas of the previous two lessons in this series. - 1927 Fight Against Jim Crow

	- The build-up to the Uprising of 1967 I don't spend a lot of time here, 2 mins max, but if you didn't do those lessons, you might want to explain a couple of the details. The key points are on the slides for you. Slide 7 is key to review: When GR built new schools after WW2, <i>their own survey</i> said inner city schools were most needed. Then, 14 went to suburbs, only 2 went to inner-city.
3 min	Slides 9-12 set up the Kerner Commission. GR leaders did not see any racial issues in the city until the uprising of '67 forced them to. GR wasn't the only city facing these issues. LBJ made an executive order to figure out what was happening. The report was clear: anti-black racism was the cause.
5 min	Explain to students that they will become school board members in this difficult time. They will be the problem solvers. They need to understand what the experts are saying about education and racism. Give students time to read/underline/highlight the commission's suggestions on education (on the handout). Have a few students share. What are the suggestions/findings? Display slide 13 (commission report) as you discuss. Note to them: to anyone truly interested, this should not be brand-new information. The Michigan Board of Education already advised districts to take racial imbalance into account back in 1961 (7 years earlier)
3 mins	Slides 14 -15 Explain the term busing. This was the most common strategy that anti-racist school boards attempted to face the issues of school segregation. The GR school board debated this highly contested issue.
5 min	Slides 16-17: Explain that as school board members they will choose between 6 possible options Slides 18-21 Before students become problem solvers, it is very important that they have an idea of what they are trying to solve. Though it will be tempting to jump right into the activity and debate, it is worth it for students to take notes and annotate the simple map first. Students have a map on the handout, the other side of the Kerner report.
18 mins	Slide 22 - To keep things clear, I read the large #1 and #2 on the board so students understand what they are about to do. #1 Walk around the room & read the options. #2 Stand next to the solution which is most likely to work. Display slide 23 Activity and class discussion: based on their knowledge and judgment, students "become a school board member" and choose between six options for the School Board. These will be printed and hung around the room. Students will walk around, read, and stand by the best option and be prepared to share their thinking with the class.

	<i>***with my students, Option C: “Two-way” COUNTYWIDE Busing has been a very popular choice for several classes. If too many students choose this option it can take away from the discussion/debate because so many people already agree. If this happens, start the discussion with option C and ask one or two students from the group to explain what they liked about this option, but then, inform them that in the early 1970s, a Federal Judge in West Michigan struck down this option as unconstitutional, so I tell students to <u>disperse into and move to the solution which they consider to be the next best option.</u></i> When most students have read the options and have chosen a decision: - Have students discuss with the people who choose the same option. - WHY did we choose this solution? - Choose a representative - Go around the room and ask for an argument for each station. - If a station is empty, ask for a volunteer why they didn’t choose that option
10 min	Back to their seats. So what did the School Board choose? Use slides 24-27 to explain that the GRPS SB picked D. South High was closed. One-way busing. Slides 28-34 have quotes from community members from 1967 and 1968 about the decision. Why do you think these people had that point of view? Display slide 35, this has the questions for the next part of the assignment. Students will explore images, stories, and quotes on their own. (they have access to this slide on the student slide deck) What happened as a result of the School Board's decision?
Rest of the class/ HW	Student Slide Deck: Post these slides for students. They will explain the effects of the school board's decision. <i>(All these slides are also attached to the end of the teacher slide deck as well)</i> Ask students to answer these questions: 1. Describe the effects of the School Board’s decision to close South High and opt for “one-way busing.” 2. After learning the result, does this change your original decision as a school board member? Why or why not? Which option do you now think would have been best? Defend your position. 3. Do you agree with federal judge Albert Engler that school segregation in West Michigan is “nobody’s” fault? Why or why not?
Next Day	I will show slide 38 from the teacher deck (image of chaos at Union High),. I will ask for student volunteers to describe a few things that stood out to them from their HW review of the student slide deck on the effects of the Board’s decision. I then close with quotes from Thurgood Marshall (slide 54 from the teacher deck), Dr. McMillin, Dr. Robinson, and Dr. Gates (55-58) and ask students what they think.

