

The Attack on Integrated Education in the South During Reconstruction: Why Scout Did Not Have Any African-American Classmates

By Paul Horton

Overview

In the world described in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Scout goes to school and does not have any black classmates. Her teacher comes from an area of North Alabama where there are very few African Americans. Students will read accounts of attempts made by the Ku Klux Klan during the Reconstruction Period to keep schools segregated. These accounts are taken from testimony given to a Senate committee that investigated Klan activities in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Students will identify the intentions of the Klan by answering questions. They will then produce a radio documentary set during the Reconstruction period.

Student Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze and interpret historical documents
- Identify the methods that the Ku Klux Klan used to intimidate educators and students
- Understand that the Klan sought to prevent the education of African Americans
- Understand that the Klan sought to prevent any form of integrated education
- Work in a group to produce a five minute documentary on the "Origins of Segregated Education in the South"

Skills attained:

- Close readings of historical documents
- Team effort to accomplish a group project
- Individual analysis and application of historical origins of segregated schools in the South
- Script writing
- Characterization and analysis of specific historical points of view

Materials Needed

- A copy of **The Klan and Education** worksheet with questions for each student.
- A copy of the group assignment and rubric for each student

The Lesson

Anticipatory Set

- Ask students to discuss the descriptions of Scout's school and her teacher and classmates. Ask them why no African-American students are among Scout's classmates. Answers will vary.

Procedures

1. **Day 1:** Pass out "The Klan and Education" sheet and questions.

2. Explain that these are historical documents taken from a Congressional investigation into the activities of the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 had been passed and the Fourteenth Amendment both required "equal protection" under the law for African Americans. In 1867 and 1868, a Federal Agency called the Freedman's Bureau set up schools for ex-slaves who were then known as freedmen. These schools sought to teach freedmen how to read and write. In addition, Freedman's Bureau schools sought to educate African Americans about their citizenship rights. These schools, not surprisingly, became Klan targets. Read the questions asked before you begin your reading and answer them in complete sentences with a partner when you have finished your reading.
3. Students will read silently for fifteen minutes.
4. Students will work with their partners for ten minutes to respond to written questions.
5. Class discussion of the questions and readings. The day's lesson will conclude with the question: What happened to Freedman's Bureau Schools during Reconstruction? Why would it have been difficult to integrate southern schools in the late 19th century based on what you read?
6. **Day 2:** Teacher will set up documentary assignment. Students will be divided into groups of four and assigned four roles: Narrator, University of Alabama Historian, 85-year-old leader of the Maycomb County African-American community, 86-year-old ex-Klan leader in Maycomb County. Students will create a five-minute radio documentary set in the 1930s that examines the history of the attacks on integrated schools in Maycomb County for the local radio station. Students will use the documents read yesterday as a basis for the program. Students will be given the remainder of the class period to develop their documentaries in the form of a script that will be used during presentations of documentaries during the next class period.
7. **Day 3:** Students are given the first five minutes of the class for group rehearsal time, and each group should perform its documentary. Classmates are permitted to ask constructive questions following each performance. When all performances are completed, the teacher leads a constructive class evaluation about the elements shared by excellent skits. Teacher concludes with the question: do you think Scout would have preferred integrated schools? Her friends? Atticus? The parents of Atticus's classmates? Maycomb County?

- Demonstrates accurate understanding of the documents provided (10pts)
- Demonstrates accurate understanding of differing attitudes about education (10pts)
- Demonstrates the persistence of racism continuing into the 1930s (10pts)
- Carefully written and acted; practiced, logical, and organized (10pts)

Literary Connections

Students should read passages of Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and/or *Uncle Tom's Children* to be able to picture the educational opportunities that young African Americans were given under Jim Crow. Students should also read relevant chapters from Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography, *Dust Tracks on the Road*, and Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi* to be able to imagine schooling for young African-American women in the Jim Crow South.

Paul Horton teaches history at Malcolm Price Laboratory School in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

The Klan and Education*

Read the following documents and answer these questions:

1. Why do you think that schoolteachers were targets of Klan threats and violence?
2. What threat did the Sunday school teacher pose to the Klan and its mission?
3. List and describe the methods used by the Klan in these passages.
4. Why was the teacher in document five whipped?
5. How do you think local authorities responded to the Klan's threats and actions described in these documents? How do you think they should've responded?

All documents are taken from U.S. Congress, *Testimony Taken by the Joint Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, 42nd Cong. 2nd sess., 1872, H. Report 22 (cited KKK Reports).

DOCUMENT ONE

They [the Klansmen] said that I had committed a great wrong; I had kept a Sunday-school which I was forbidden to do. They told me that this thing of teaching ... was something they did not allow; that the church they belonged to never sanctioned [allowed] any such thing; that it was not sanctioned by the neighborhood or the country and it must not be done, and finally they told me it should not be done and when I proceeded on with the Sunday-school, they said to me, "We gave you orders to stop and you have continued against our orders; now you have got to stop."
--SAMUEL ALLEN, a church Sunday-schoolteacher, in testimony before the U.S. Senate Select Committee, 1871

DOCUMENT TWO

Many schoolhouses were burned through northern Alabama, and marked hostility was shown to the schoolteachers, especially in opposition to those who taught colored schools (pp.139, 140)
--KKK Reports, Vol. 1, 72

DOCUMENT THREE

In Pontotoc County the white population largely predominates. There were fifty-two white and twelve colored schools organized. The colored schools employed teachers of a lower grade of qualifications and at smaller salaries than the whites. The most of the teachers employed were natives of the South. Colonel Flournoy, the county superintendent, testifies that although he made no distinction in politics in employing them, he found, upon inquiry, that of the sixty-four teachers engaged but eleven were republicans, and but one of them a colored man.

In April and May 1871, a number of the teachers of the colored schools were called upon by the Ku-Klux and warned that if they did not stop teaching they would be "dealt with." (P. 821.)

A teacher named Smith had been twice called upon, and after the second visit abandoned his school, having, as was generally believed, been whipped, although he was too high-spirited to admit it. Having stated this (p. 86) Colonel Flournoy proceeded, (p. 87:)

Question: Did he communicate to you the reason he gave for making that demand upon him?
Answer: Yes, sir; they said they were determined that there should be no colored schools kept; that they intended to break up every one of them in the State; that it was useless to contend

about it; that they should be stopped.
--*KKK Reports, Vol. 1, 74*

DOCUMENT FOUR

In April, two of the board of school directors of Monroe County who had voted in favor of imposing school tax were warned by the Ku-Klux to leave the board, and in pursuance of that notice one of them did resign. About the same time all the teachers on the east side of the Tombigbee River, in that county, were notified by them to close their schools, and did so, twenty-six schools being thus interrupted (pp. 281, 282). They went in a body at night and gave these warnings to the teachers.

Among those called upon was a Miss Sarah A. Allen, a lady sent by a missionary society from Geneseo, Illinois, and engaged in teaching one of the free schools. Eighty Ku-Klux came at 12 o'clock on a Monday night, after she had retired, entered her room, and told her she must close her school on Wednesday; that if they came again she would not get off so easily. She reported this to Colonel Huggins, who says: "Miss Allen made this statement to me herself. She is a highly educated and accomplished young lady."--*KKK Reports, Vol. 1, 77*

DOCUMENT FIVE

The last week in March there was a raid made over several counties there. I had several warnings, in the shape of several schoolhouses being burned there; but inasmuch as I was on good terms with the people in the neighborhood where I was teaching, I did not apprehend any difficulty. There was a schoolhouse burned down not far off from where I lived; Mr. Burt Moore was teaching the school there, and they threatened his life if he did not stop teaching. At Houston several teachers of colored schools were attacked; one of them told me that they ordered him to leave in three days or they would take his life. His wife was about to be confined, but he had to leave. But I did not fear any difficulty for myself, inasmuch as I had opened the school there with the consent of the white people in the neighborhood. During the last week in March some of my scholars told me they had heard that the Ku-Klux were out after me, but I did not pay any attention to it. I boarded with Mr. Thomas Johnson, an old gentleman; he was then in Alabama, and I was alone in the big house, and I had no arms in the house. There were some colored people living in cabins in the yard, but there was no one with me in Mr. Johnson's house. Between 12 and 1 o'clock on Thursday night, in the last week of March, a body of men came to the house, burst in the doors and windows, and presented their rifles at me. I asked them, "What are you all coming here this time of night for, making this row?" The leader of the party said, "You God damned Yankee, come out here." Well, I realized my position at once; I knew it was a matter of life and death; I did not believe those men came there merely to whip me and then leave me, as they did colored men; I thought they meant to kill me, and I made up my mind to make an effort to escape. There were two men standing at the window with their rifles presented at me; I leaped out of the window, right between those two men.

Question: Were you in bed when they came there?

Answer: Yes, sir; I was in bed when they came. I jumped out of the window and ran to the house of a colored man in the yard, where there was a double-barreled gun; I was determined to get that, if I could, and defend myself. I had no time to wait for the colored woman to open the door, but I just burst right in. While I was running down the yard, they fired at me a number of times, crying out, "God damn you, stop, or we will blow your God damned brains out."

Question: Did any but the two men fire who were at the window where you jumped out?

Answer: I do not know; I expect that the whole party fired, from the reports; I do not know.

By Mr. BECK:

Question: Were you hit?

Answer: No sir.

By the CHAIRMAN, (Mr. POLAND)

Question: Go on with your story.

Answer: While I was in the cabin trying to find the gun, these men came in before I could find it. There were two rooms in the house of the colored man, and I went into one of them and tried to hide. They came in and searched for me and got me. The colored people prayed to them, "O, don't hurt Mr. Mac; for God's sake let him alone." They said, "Don't make that noise; keep quiet; we will not hurt you; hold your tongues." They took me out of the house and across the yard; I asked them in what way I had injured them to justify that attack on me. They cursed me, told me to stop talking, struck me in the side with their bowie knives that had their scabbards on, and with the but-ends of their pistols. They took me scarcely a quarter of a mile from the house, to a field near the road, and told me to take off my shirt, which I refused to do. Then one fellow struck me on the head with a pistol, cut my head, and knocked my down, and then pulled off my shirt.

Question: You had nothing on but your shirt then?

Answer: No, sir. Two of them then held me down, and one of them took a bundle of black-gum switches. I did not know what they were then, but one of the colored people told me the next day that they had picked up some thirty, and that they were black-gum.

Question: Black-gum switches?

Answer: Yes, sir; a peculiar kind of stick, which stings and raises the flesh when it hits. One of them took the bundle of switches and commenced to whip me. They said they were going to give me a hundred each. I do not know how many men there were; I counted only five around me, but I believe there were more than a dozen there. They agreed to give me a hundred lashes each. One man gave me a hundred, and then handed the bundle of switches to another, who gave me about seventy-five. He said he had given me seventy-five when I escaped from them. I asked them while they were whipping me what I had done to merit that treatment. They said I wanted to make these niggers equal to the white men; that this was a white man's country. They said, "God damn you! Don't you know this is a white man's country?" I said, "The white people in the neighborhood are satisfied with my conduct and the manner I have been conducting the school here. They have shown it by selecting me to take charge of their Sunday-school." They said, "Yes, God damn you, that is the worst feature in it, having a nigger teacher to teach the white school on Sunday!" I was fighting them all the time as well as I could--kicking at them and doing what I could--for the torture was horrible. I thought they would kill me any way when they got through whipping me, and I begged them to shoot me. One of them came up to me with his pistol and asked me if I wanted to be shot. I said, "Yes; I can't stand this." The leader of the party said, "Shooting is too good for this fellow. We will hang him when we get through whipping him." I saw a rope hanging from a limb of a tree by the side of the road. There was only one man standing between me and the fence of the plantation. I observed that, and I tried to gain his attention, for I was determined to make an effort to escape. They threatened to hang me, or to tie me. I hardly know what they said. I thought they were going to hang me. I got the attention of this man for a moment. He was standing between me and the fence, and had two pistols. I asked him whether they would let me off if I would promise to leave in the morning. All this time they were whipping me, but I managed to partly raise myself. I was half way up, on my hand and knee; I made a spring and made for this man, and struck at him as hard as I could. I do not know what part of his body I struck. I know he disappeared; I do not know where he went. The way was then clear to the fence, and I leaped the fence. As I did so they swore terribly and fired at me, and the shots went just over my head, scattering the leaves all around me. As I went across the field they kept firing at me and followed me a short distance. By that time the neighborhood was alarmed, hearing my screams and the shooting. I went back to the house to get the gun I was after in the first place; but the colored people had hidden it, thinking that if I got it and shot at them they would kill me, but that without it they would let me off with a whipping. I went to the house of a

neighbor there, Mr. Walser, and remained there during the rest of the night. Mr. Walser of course sympathized with me; he was my near neighbor and my friend. He said. "My God! Has it come to this now, that no man is safe, when you are attacked?" It was a very cold night, that night was-- piercing cold. Before I went to Mr. Walser's house I had staid in the woods for probably half an hour. The blood was running down my back, and my suffering was fearful. Mr. Walser was afraid if I staid at his house they might come there; but I remained there that night. The next day I taught my school as usual. They had threatened me while they were whipping me that if I held the examination I had advertised--they spoke something about the examination, and said they were preparing me for examination in another way. Some colored people brought me word that if I held that examination the Ku-Klux would come again and kill me that time sure; but I held my examination the following Monday notwithstanding the threats. I went there with a gun over my shoulder, and several people came there and brought their guns, and I held the examination. That night several white men and some colored men and myself laid out in the woods expecting that the Ku-Klux would come.

--*KKK Reports, Vol. 1, pp. 78-79*

*All documents from U.S. Congress *Testimony Taken by the Joint Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, 42nd Cong. 2nd sess., 1872, H. Report 22 (cited KKK Reports).