

# LESSONS FROM LITTLE ROCK

## Study Guide For Teachers

This study guide is designed to assist you as you lead your young students through LESSONS FROM LITTLE ROCK. There are twenty units that may be used independently or in combination; one each for the nineteen chapters in the book and one concluding unit designed to elicit creative responses from the students. You may wish to use all or some of the behavioral objectives listed below as you prepare plans for learning.

At the conclusion of studying this book, students will be able to:

- Identify the salient reasons why Little Rock erupted as it did in 1957
- Understand the motivations of the Little Rock Nine
- Explain why only nine black children were involved
- Demonstrate knowledge of the most significant public figures involved in the process
- Discuss the importance of education for the Little Rock Nine
- Answer questions about the use of army troops to enforce school integration
- Cite the reasons why the Little Rock Nine chose to be non-violent
- Show how the governor of Arkansas was able to stall the integration process
- Calculate the physical and emotional costs for the Little Rock Nine
- Locate the probable starting point for the Little Rock integration crisis
- Speak with candor about the probable differences between Little Rock and Los Angeles in 1958
- Uncover significant underlying elements that helped the Little Rock Nine to retain executive control of their learning

The foregoing list of behavioral objectives is not meant to be exhaustive, but is merely suggestive of the way in which students might be encouraged to think about the issues raised in the book. There will be specific questions posed in each of the nineteen units that relate to the behavioral objectives. Please add to the list as you discover learning points for your students. It is hoped as well that your ability to assess the learning of each student will be enhanced by use of the objectives.

A study guide is just that, a guide. It is not offered as a substitute for your overall approach to teaching about this book. It is my considered opinion that the greatest learning will take place when the students have a grasp of the context in which the Little Rock school integration crisis occurred. If they have an understanding of the prevailing political, economic, social, cultural, racial, and religious dynamics of the time, it will be easier for them to sort out the particulars. They will be able to pose more salient questions, synthesize disparate elements with less confusion about the resulting hybrids, and develop the ability to think critically and analytically about this and other like situations.

I realize too that yours is a sacred trust; you have been chosen to guide the learning process of these growing citizens of the universe. It is with that in mind that I have attempted to share my thinking about how best to use this book. Looking through the lens of one who has been so selected, it has been my wish here to offer as much support as I can in the name of helping you launch these young people into a future where we will not be present. As Gibran writes in *THE PROPHET*, “You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.” And they are, indeed, your children. They will take with them all that you have to give and if what you provide helps them to make sense of the world in which they will live, so much the better. Learning the “Lessons From Little Rock” may allow you and your charges to face the coming tomorrows with a greater sense of understanding about human dynamics and the ways in which we must confront the evils of racism in society.

## Chapter One

### (My Moment as a fly)

In this first chapter Roberts talks about the degree of fear he felt during the ordeal at Central. The chapter opens with a review of an encounter between him and an aggressive white student on the school playing field. This is followed by a narrative detailing the possible dangers involved in disobeying the rules of segregation; Roberts sits down in an eating establishment where black people are expressly forbidden to sit down. This is his “moment as a fly.”

Roberts’ birth announcement in the local Little Rock newspaper gives evidence to support the pervasive nature of segregation in that black people cannot be introduced by the usual and ordinary social titles of Mr. and Mrs. This is seen as proof that the “task of culture” as proclaimed by social anthropologist Ernest Becker is not at work for Roberts and others like him in Little Rock; he is not seen as a person of value.

The Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* was the “law of the land” when Roberts was born. Separate but equal was the standard for race relations. And, of course, things were indeed separate, but never, in fact, equal. The study of chapter one allows teachers to help students understand the nature of the *Plessy* decision and how much of an impact it made in the lives of black people in this country.

### Study Questions for Chapter One

1. Macauley chose not to hit Roberts with the baseball bat. What do you think happened inside Macauley to make him drop the bat?

2. Have you ever been as afraid as Roberts must have been?
3. What are the ways you use to overcome fear?
4. Why do you think black people were not allowed to sit down in restaurants in Little Rock?
5. Roberts felt small and as vulnerable as a fly; have you ever felt like that?
6. Black adults in Little Rock were not called Mr. or Mrs. but were referred to by their first names. What was this all about?
7. The 1896 Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson created the doctrine of “Separate but Equal.” What do you think was meant by that?
8. Roberts was forced by law and custom to live in only certain parts of the city. Do you think this was unfair? Why, or why not?
9. How would you feel if you were treated like Roberts was treated?
10. Are there any parts of your city that are “segregated?”

**Vocabulary words: Chapter One**

- **Debris**
- **Grievous**
- **Maelstrom**
- **Unencumbered**

**Debris:**

**The remains of something broken down or destroyed**

**Grievous:**

**Causing or characterized by severe pain, suffering, or sorrow.**

**Maelstrom:**

**A powerful often violent whirlpool sucking in objects within a given radius.**

**Unencumbered:**

**Free of encumbrance; not impeded. Free to move about.**

## Chapter Two (First Grade Executives)

The second chapter details more of the rules of segregation and speaks to the optimism Roberts felt as a young man. Part of the optimism was generated by the input from a cadre of black teachers in the racially segregated schools he attended in Little Rock. Roberts' first grade teacher told him he had to become the "executive in charge of his own learning." Later, at Dunbar Junior high School, Roberts was guided by several teachers who followed the same rules as his first grade teacher. Additionally they exhorted him to master the English language and study hard all the time.

Roberts learned that teachers were not perfect as well; this was especially important in his developing a balanced approach to life. The metaphor of "family" is used to illustrate how the segregated school system worked to instill positive values in all of the students. Within this same crucible black students learned how disastrous it could be if negative values were adopted.

Teachers assumed the role of parents in this scenario and taught subject matter that was outside the boundary of the prescribed academic curriculum. Roberts and his classmates learned about the need to be good citizens, responsible sexual beings, and above all, excellent students.

### Study Questions for Chapter Two

1. What does it mean to become the executive in charge of your own learning?
2. Reading was an important part of Roberts' life. Why do you think this was so?

3. Who is the person most responsible for your learning?
4. Why were the teachers at Dunbar so concerned about students' behavior?
5. Roberts remembers hearing adults in his world say: "Boy, get your education." What did they mean?
6. Why was Mrs. Dozier so upset about the fighting in the hallway?
7. What ways other than fighting can be used to settle disputes?
8. Roberts did not develop a strong southern accent; why do you think his speech patterns were different from most of those around him?
9. If you were called "nerd" how would you respond?
10. Miss Tate used to say: "He who thinks by the inch and talks by the yard should be removed by the foot." What did she intend to communicate by saying this?

### **Vocabulary words: Chapter Two**

- **Audacity**
- **Convolutions**
- **Hierarchy**
- **Mesmerized**
- **Monumental**
- **Perturbed**
- **Resemblance**

#### **Audacity:**

**Bold or arrogant disregard of normal restraints; recklessly bold.**

**Convolutions:**

**A convoluted form or structure; folded or curved in tortuous windings; twistings or curvings.**

**Hierarchy:**

**A body of persons in authority ranked from highest to lowest.**

**Mesmerized:**

**Hypnotized, or spellbound.**

**Monumental:**

**Very great, outstanding.**

**Perturbed:**

**Thrown into confusion; disturbed greatly in mind.**

**Resemblance:**

**The quality or state of resembling; correspondence in appearance**



## Chapter Three

### (A Minister Who Learned The Wrong Lesson)

In this third chapter we discover the role religion played in Roberts' life in Little Rock. We note also his distinction between religion and spirituality. It was, in part, his awareness of the existence of God that gave him the courage to enter Central High School each day to face the hostile mob awaiting him.

A significant lesson in this chapter has to do with his learning about the myriad ways in which people interpret the messages from the Bible. At one point he is told by a minister that he "has no business being at Central." Another minister confronted him about his knowledge of the Bible in a way designed to expose his ignorance.

The contradictions and anomalies he faced in religious arenas helped Roberts to develop his own spiritual resources; he did not allow the choices of others to dictate his beliefs about things spiritual.

### Study Questions for Chapter Three

1. Roberts spent a lot of time in church. What do you think he learned there?
2. What is the role of religion in our society?
3. During Roberts' childhood in Little Rock, churches were segregated. Do you think churches are still segregated?
4. Do you think the Golden Rule can be applied today?

5. Roberts writes that as we are physical, mental, social, and psychological beings, we are also spiritual. What do you think he meant?
6. How did Roberts learn the true value of spirituality?
7. Roberts described the church as a shelter or sanctuary. What was he trying to escape?
8. Roberts refers to the South as the “Bible Belt.” What does he mean by this?
9. In discussing the time he spent in church, Roberts speaks about “sinful behavior.” What is the definition of that term?
10. Do you think it is important to treat all people with respect?

**Vocabulary words: Chapter Three**

- Admonition
- Affiliation
- Censure
- Turmoil
- Vigilant

**Admonition:**

Gentle or friendly reproof; counsel or warning against fault or oversight.

Affiliation:

To be in close association with another, or others; connected with others.

Censure:

A judgment involving condemnation.

Turmoil:

An utterly confused or extremely agitated state or condition.

Vigilant:

Keeping watch; staying awake. Alertly watchful, especially to avoid danger.

## Chapter Four

### (Saved by the West Ninth Street Taxi)

Chapter four is an extension of the discussion of spirituality as it was manifested daily in the halls of Central High. In a way, one might conclude that salvation by the West Ninth Street taxi was a result of divine intervention. There were certainly many other situations that developed during the year that had virtually no other explanation than oversight by a power much greater than nine young black kids!

A conversation with Carlotta Lanier, another one of the Nine, is included in this chapter. Her level of concern for her attackers is evidence of her spiritual awareness. She acted with dignity; she knew better than to behave as did her tormentors.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is introduced in this chapter as well along with Jim Lawson and Glenn Smiley. Their instruction about the value of non-violence was indispensable to the Little Rock nine.

### Study Questions for Chapter Four

1. Who were the “worst” white people who abused black people in Little Rock?
2. Some white people attempted to define black people as less than human. What was their reason for doing so?
3. Carlotta said: “I know better than to behave that way.” What did she mean?
4. Dr. King, Jim Lawson, and Glenn Smiley urged the Little Rock Nine to adopt the principles of non-violence. Do you think this was a wise choice?

5. What is the key to being truly non-violent?
6. Is it possible to live in our society today and be non-violent?
7. What was it about the Little Rock Nine that gave them the courage to be non-violent?
8. Imagine yourself in Roberts' position as he is being attacked in the Central High hallways. What would you have done?
9. Some kids are told that if someone hits them, they should hit back. What is your thought about this instruction?
10. Roberts writes about "evil intent" in his explanation of some of the things that happened to him. What is your understanding of "evil intent?"

**Vocabulary words: Chapter Four**

- Fortitude
- Impunity
- Systemic
- Undergird

Fortitude:

Strength of mind that enables a person to encounter danger or bear pain or adversity with courage.

Impunity:

Exemption or freedom from punishment, harm, or loss.

Systemic:

Common to a system; affecting the body generally.

Undergird:

To make secure underneath; to form the basis or foundation of.

Chapter Five  
(Finding Dad Before He Drank Up The Paycheck)

In this chapter we find out details about the inner workings of the Roberts family. His parents, both born in Little Rock in 1920, struggle to cope with myriad problems. In spite of their shortcomings, however, both demonstrate an ability to provide support to their oldest son as he confronts the life-threatening issues at Central High.

Family is the crucible in which one learns about life and how it is to be lived. Most of what Roberts learned came directly from his mother; his dad was overwhelmed by the circumstances of his life and sought to dull the sharp edges of reality by drinking to excess. In a very real way, this too was instructive in that it highlighted the consequences of destructive choices.

It was at home that Roberts learned about the myth of peer pressure, sibling rivalry, and how to avoid fighting with others. Most of all, he learned about the value of education and was encouraged to get the most out of his school experience.

Study Questions for Chapter Five

1. What were the most significant things Roberts learned at home?
2. Based on what you read, what was the nature of the relationship between Roberts and his dad? His mom?
3. In your mind, what were the reasons for Roberts' dad's irresponsible behavior?
4. Watching his mom, 'the hugger,' what did Roberts learn?
5. Why is it that human beings never have to fight?

6. What were some of the practical things done by Roberts' mom to maintain family balance?
7. What is meant by this statement: "What other people think about you is none of your business?"
8. What are the benefits of reading as much as possible?
9. Both parents were willing to support Roberts' decision to attend Central High. Why did they make the decision to do so?
10. According to Roberts, the reality of racism did not have to dictate the quality of interaction between people. What did he mean by this?

**Vocabulary words: Chapter Five**

- Crucible
- Exacerbated
- Permeated
- Replica
- Sole

Crucible:

A vessel used to refine substances that require a high degree of heat; a severe test.

Exacerbated:



Made more violent, bitter, or severe.

Permeated:

Spread or diffused through a given environment; penetrated,

Replica:

A close reproduction or facsimile.

Sole:

Being the only one; functioning independently without assistance.

## Chapter Six (Stretch It Out)

In this chapter we meet some of the Roberts' family tree members as they wend their way through life. It is possible to imagine the full range of personalities and attitudes as you read the stories about a selected few. Several life lessons are highlighted as Roberts discovers how many different world views are distributed along the family continuum.

You will be amazed as Roberts reveals the hidden gems to be found in racially segregated neighborhoods. In a world fashioned to keep black people on the margins of society, residents in the shunned enclaves discover ways to thrive.

### Study Questions for Chapter Six

1. "Go back and stretch it out, they are paying you by the hour." How did Roberts respond to this input? Why?
2. What would you have done in the above situation?
3. Why was Uncle Leady "on the verge" of asking for his money back?
4. His teenaged cousins were reading a document Roberts found to be demeaning to black people. What is the most appropriate response in such a situation?
5. Why did his older relatives find the document to be funny?
6. Roberts mentions the dangers inherent in living at either end of the family continuum. What did he mean by that?

7. Did all black people in Little Rock live in the same neighborhood?
8. Were there any white people who lived near black people in Little Rock?
9. What were the most important aspects for young black people living in the segregated neighborhoods in Little Rock?
10. Roberts uses the term “dynamic” to describe the black neighborhood where he lived. Why do you think he used this term?

**Vocabulary words: Chapter Six**

- Contingent
- Credentials
- Furtively
- Inertia

Contingent:

Likely but not certain to happen; dependent upon or conditioned by something else.

Credentials:

Something showing that a person is entitled to or has the right to exercise official power.

Furtively:

Done by stealth; something done in secret.

Inertia:

A property of matter by which it remains at rest or in uniform motion in the same straight line unless acted upon by something else.

Chapter Seven  
(Three Dollars, An eel, And Bright Kids)

Several themes emerge in this chapter as Roberts describes the neighborhood in which he grew up. There are depictions of some of his neighbors and images of life as lived in the early forties. You learn about influences on Roberts from family and friends; you witness a poignant encounter between Roberts and his mom; his participation as a little leaguer and Boy Scout is highlighted.

You learn about two other sources of fear for Roberts in this chapter as he tells us about the death of Emmett Till in nearby Mississippi, and his encounter with bullies in Little Rock. He discusses also his fear of fighting especially when the fights seemed to ignore rules of fair play.

The latter part of this chapter explores the issues of skin color, hair texture, and social class as elements of life among Roberts and his Junior High School classmates. It was at this point in life when Roberts discovered the term “bright” as an adjective for skin color and not an assessment of intellect.

Study Questions for Chapter Seven

1. It would appear the Roberts chose Mr. Campbell as one of his role models. Why do you think he made that choice?
2. Roberts learns that his mom is not perfect. What is his response to this revelation?
3. Why was Roberts’ mom so upset when he shot an arrow into a passing car?

4. What happened to Emmett Till and why was Roberts so afraid when he learned about it?
5. Roberts talks about lessons learned as a member of a little league team and as a Boy Scout. What were those lessons?
6. In his discussion about bullies Roberts mentions the need to have strategies ready to confront them. What do you think he means by that?
7. What, if any, are the rules of “fair fighting?”
8. Skin color distinctions were made by classmates in Roberts’ Junior high School. Why do you think they did so?
9. Were the differences in skin color more important or less important than differences in hair texture? Why?
10. Do people today still make unfair comparisons between people based on income or occupation?

**Vocabulary words: Chapter Seven**

- Continuum
- Extent
- Triangular
- Virtue

Continuum:

An uninterrupted ordered sequence; a series in which a basic common character can be detected.

Extent:

The point, degree, or limit to which something extends.

Triangular:

Relating to or having the form of a triangle.

Virtue:

Conformity to a standard of right; a particular moral excellence.

Chapter Eight  
(The All-White Electrician's Union)

In this chapter Roberts explains some of the circumstances surrounding his early work life as a delivery boy for a local drugstore and his stint as a helper for an electrician. He provides a glimpse of some of the overt racism he encountered during that time as well. Learning how to be an effective participant in an adult world is a theme of this chapter.

Study Questions for Chapter Eight

1. What specific things did Roberts learn about the practice of racism between the ages of ten and twelve?
2. Why was it important for Roberts to have a job at this age?
3. What made his work as an electrician's helper a positive experience?
4. Why do you think Dr. Floyd's name was enough to shield Roberts from negative behaviors when he went to buy tickets to the wrestling matches?
5. Who were the noted African-Americans whose names were used for two of Roberts' schools?



## Vocabulary words: Chapter Eight

- Clientele
- Disdain
- Nuances
- Variations

Clientele:

A body of clients.

Disdain:

To look with scorn on; a feeling of contempt for what is beneath one.

Nuances:

Subtle distinctions or variations.

Variations:

The act or process of varying; the extents to which or the ranges in which a thing varies.

## Chapter Nine

### (The Little Rock Seventeen)

Details about the School Board's plan to desegregate schools in Little Rock are presented in this chapter. Roberts speaks also about his optimism that change was inevitable in the wake of the Brown decision which had outlawed school segregation. Readers will gain a more complete understanding of why there were only nine black students and they will have an opportunity to live through that first day as seen through the eyes of Roberts. He writes about the traumatic experience of Elizabeth Eckford as he attempts to give the reader a sense of the dangers that were present. His account of the role played by Philander Smith College is highlighted in this chapter.

### Study Questions for Chapter Nine

1. What were Roberts' reasons for volunteering to be one of the Little Rock nine?
2. What was the School Board's attitude toward the student volunteers?
3. Some say it was the governor's fault that violence erupted. What do you think?
4. What did Roberts' parents have to say about his participation in the school desegregation?
5. What was Elizabeth's response to the menacing mob?
6. How did Roberts handle his fear?
7. Were all white people in Little Rock opposed to school desegregation?
8. How long were the Little Rock Nine forced to remain out of school?
9. What did they do in the interim?
10. What do you think the opposition was doing in the interim?

### **Vocabulary words: Chapter Nine**

- Caravan
- Contraband
- Hiatus
- Portent
- Surly

Caravan:

A group of vehicles traveling together in single file.

Contraband:

Illegal or prohibited goods or merchandise.

Hiatus:

A lapse in continuity; a break (often a rest break).

Portent:

Something that foreshadows a coming event; an omen.

Surly:

Irritably sullen and churlish in mood and manner.

## Chapter Ten

(Daisy Bates and Thurgood Marshall)

The central roles played by Thurgood Marshall and Wiley Branton, the attorneys who represented the Little Rock Nine, are highlighted here. They represented the NAACP's Legal Defense and Educational Fund and fought valiantly to force Faubus to give up his opposition. L.C. and Daisy Bates were two of the most active supporters of the Little Rock Nine. The two of them published the Arkansas State Press, a local newspaper with and in which they waged a continual assault against racial discrimination. In this chapter readers learn about the extreme danger faced by the black students when they entered the school under the protection of the Little Rock police force.

### Study Questions for Chapter Ten

1. Can you identify and describe Wiley Branton and Thurgood Marshall?
2. Who were L.C. and Daisy Bates?
3. What primary purpose was served by their newspaper, the Arkansas State Press?
4. What was the level of danger for the Little Rock Nine on the day they were escorted to school by the Little Rock police?
5. What is the NAACP, and what role did this organization play in Little Rock in 1957?
6. What happened to James Hicks, Moses Newsome, and Alex Wilson on September 23, 1957?
7. What significant role was played by the three men mentioned in question five?
8. In what ways was Alex Wilson an inspiration for Roberts?
9. Who was Gene Smith?

10. Roberts says that one lesson he learned was that most white Americans do not understand how racism affects the lives of people of color. What do you think he meant?

**Vocabulary words: Chapter Ten**

- Dignity
- Disarray
- Injunction
- Jeopardy
- Miniscule (Also minuscule)

Dignity:

The quality or state of being worthy, honored, or esteemed.

Disarray:

Disorder, or to throw into disorder.

Injunction:

A writ granted by a court whereby one is required to do or to refrain from doing a specified act.

Jeopardy:

Exposure to or imminence of death, loss, or injury.

Miniscule: (Also minuscule)

Very small.

## Chapter Eleven

### (A System For Rating Insults)

In this chapter Roberts presents some of the mental mechanisms he used to weather the storm of insults he faced at Central; he writes as well about how he developed this tactic even prior to going to Central. Additionally, he tells about life at school under the protection of the U.S. Army and how even with the soldiers present, the Nine were battered often during that school year. In this chapter Roberts speaks candidly about his decision to abandon the practice of nonviolence (temporarily) in the face of a challenge laid down by his PE teacher.

#### Study Questions for Chapter Eleven

1. Why was President Eisenhower reluctant to send military troops to Little Rock?
2. What immediate change was effected by the soldiers?
3. Two significant command decisions were made by General Walker. What were they?
4. Even with the soldiers present, the Nine students were beaten and harassed? How did this happen?
5. How was Roberts able to employ his mental rating system with such success?
6. Roberts chose to suspend his own practice of nonviolence at one point during the year. Why did he do that?
7. What do you think were the motivating factors for Jerry Tuley?
8. Roberts' mom burned some of the hate mail they received at home. Was this a good idea?
9. Roberts felt stress at school and at home. What were the stress producing factors in each of these settings?
10. What response could Roberts have given to his English teacher?

### **Vocabulary words: Chapter Eleven**

- Aggravate
- Convoy
- Culprit
- Persuade
- Taunting

Aggravate:

To make worse, more serious, or more severe.

Convoy:

To escort for protection; the act of convoying.

Culprit:

One accused of or charged with a crime; one guilty of a crime.

Persuade:

To move by argument, entreaty, or expostulation to a belief, posture, or course of action.

Taunting:

Sarcastically challenging or insulting.

Chapter Twelve  
(The Penknife And The Switchblade)

Roberts again visits the notion of stress and how much pressure is brought to bear on a person under stressful conditions; he talks about his inner fight to stay or leave Central during the year. In this chapter he introduces Robin Woods, a white student who shares her algebra book with him. Robin was willing to defy the social code that prohibited interaction with the Nine. The “switchblade incident” is highlighted in this chapter as Roberts explains how and why he took a knife to school. And, in the final paragraphs, he writes about the attitudes of some of his former black classmates toward him and the other eight members of this group of Nine.

Study Questions for Chapter Twelve

1. What gave Roberts the motivation to continue going to school under such adverse conditions?
2. How and why is threat such a stress producing phenomenon?
3. Why was Roberts’ algebra class such a haven of safety?
4. What gave Robin Woods the motivation to help Roberts?
5. Roberts agreed to take the switchblade that was offered by his friend. Why did he do that?
6. When Roberts took the knife to school what awaited him and how did it turn out?
7. Is it ever really a good idea to carry a knife?
8. The school officials forced to the Little Rock Nine to sign an affidavit stating that they were not to participate in any extracurricular activities. Why would school officials do such a thing?
9. What was so provocative about the card with silhouettes?
10. Not all of Roberts’ former black classmates were supportive of his choice to go to Central. How did they make this known?



## Vocabulary words: Chapter Twelve

- Deference
- Haven
- Herculean
- Infuriate
- Stereotype

Deference:

Respect or esteem due an elder or superior.

Haven:

A place of safety.

Herculean:

Of extraordinary power, size, or difficulty.

Infuriate:

To anger.

Stereotype:

A standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, affective attitude, or uncritical judgment.

Chapter Thirteen  
(The Emotional Price of Non-Violence)

It is here that Roberts confronts his own emotional distress in the face of untenable situations; one in which he fails to act in defense of Minnijean Brown, one of the Little Rock nine, and another when he faces a white student who has just kicked the back of his chair. In both cases Roberts felt unprepared and ill-equipped to handle the pressures. But, in spite of all the negative, horrific experiences, Roberts talks about how they, the Little Rock Nine, were able to maintain their academic focus.

Study Questions for Chapter Thirteen

1. Why was one of the Nine kicked out of school?
2. Why did Roberts feel that he had let her down?
3. It was Roberts' thought that dialogue between himself and his attackers could serve to lessen or end the hostilities. Do you think that is a good idea?
4. Roberts revisits the notion of being the executive in charge of his education. How was he able to be an "executive" in this chapter?
5. What was the meaning of "One down, eight to go?"
6. How were the Little Rock Nine able to concentrate on their studies?
7. Roberts thought he might get a grade of "F" from his English teacher. Why did he think so?
8. What were his Grades? Does that surprise you?

### **Vocabulary words: Chapter Thirteen**

- Contoured
- Incident
- Reluctance
- Retaliation
- Spontaneous

Contoured:

Shaped or curved to fit a particular outline.

Incident:

An occurrence of an action or a situation; a happening.

Reluctance:

The quality or state of being reluctant; struggling against; holding back.

Retaliation:

The act of returning like for like; revenge.

Spontaneous:

Proceeding from natural feeling or native tendency without external constraint; arising from a momentary impulse.

## Chapter Fourteen

### (Lessons From The Barbershop and Lawn-Mowing Clients)

Roberts speaks clearly about the life lessons he learned as he sat waiting his turn in the barbershop, and from the responses of white customers who cancelled his lawn-mowing and leaf-raking services when he joined the Little Rock Nine. From the barbers and their adult customers, he learned the lessons they thought he needed to know. In the barbershop you might be singled out for commentary on some aspect of your apparel, attitude, or ambition; all designed to motivate toward positive goals. On the other hand, what he learned from the white customers was that it is never okay to challenge the status quo. The fears and concerns of both black and white people are addressed as he explores the construct of the “bad nigger.”

### Study Questions for Chapter Fourteen

1. What was the unspoken message being delivered by the policemen who banged on the car?
2. What was a poll tax and why was it employed in Little Rock?
3. Can you describe some of the elements that were required to maintain the racial balance in Little Rock in the fifties?
4. Why would the Little Rock Nine be called “bad niggers?”
5. And why was it rumored that they had been imported from New York or Chicago?
6. Did Roberts’ next door neighbor have a right to be upset?
7. As they cancelled his services, what message do you think Roberts’ white employers wished to give him?
8. Roberts’ uncle defied the custom of only using the back door when entering a home owned by white people; how was this possible?

9. What do you think the men in the barbershop wanted Roberts and other young black boys to know?
10. What do you think the telegram means?

**Vocabulary words: Chapter Fourteen**

- Enigmatic
- Onerous
- Pedestrian
- Status quo

Enigmatic:

Relating to or resembling an enigma; puzzling; hard to understand.

Onerous:

Involving, constituting, or imposing a burden.

Pedestrian:

A person going on foot.

Status Quo:

The existing state of affairs.

Chapter Fifteen  
(Unexpected Move To Los Angeles)

Orval Faubus, the Governor of Arkansas in 1958, decided in that year to close all public high schools in Little Rock rather than continue the process of desegregation. His action prompted Roberts to move to Los Angeles to continue his high school education. In this chapter Roberts writes about the school closure in Little Rock and about coping with racism in California.

Study Questions for Chapter Fifteen

1. After a harrowing year at Central High school, Roberts was ready to return for his senior year. Why did he consider going back?
2. Was it legal for the Governor to close the high schools in Little Rock?
3. Were there other examples of school closings to prevent integration?
4. Do you think the Governors who closed schools were concerned about the kids who were missing classes?
5. What would you do if there were no schools to attend?
6. Roberts confronted Governor Faubus about his school closing actions. What was the Governor's response?
7. The high schools in Little Rock were re-opened in the 1959-60 school year. Did black students go to Central that year?
8. Why did Roberts choose to move to Los Angeles?
9. What happened to other members of the Little Rock Nine?
10. Was Roberts able to escape racism in Los Angeles?

## Vocabulary words: Chapter Fifteen

- Egregious
- Raucous
- Siblings
- Sustain
- Turbulent

Egregious:

Conspicuously bad; flagrant.

Raucous:

Boisterously disorderly; strident.

Siblings:

Two or more individuals having at least one parent in common.

(Generally now more inclusive)

Sustain:

To give support or relief to; to supply with nourishment.

Turbulent:

Characterized by agitation or tumult.

## Chapter Sixteen

### (Those Who Would Re-Write History)

In this brief account, Roberts seeks to explore with the reader how some in this country choose to interpret past events as having supported the building of racial harmony. In fact, some go so far as to say that the Nine were actually welcomed into Central high School! Roberts offers a different point of view and suggests that official reports and archival footage may be used to get to the truth of the matter.

### Study Questions for Chapter Sixteen

1. Is it now time to celebrate racial progress? Why? Why not?
2. Some say that racism is an artifact of the distant past; what do you think?
3. What, if any, relationship is there between practices of racism and the ongoing gap in income and wealth between white and black Americans?

### Vocabulary words: Chapter Sixteen

- Deluded
- Reconciliation
- Unconscionable

Deluded:

Misled or deceived.



**Reconciliation:**

The act or state of being reconciled; a restoration of harmony.

**Unconscionable:**

Not guided or controlled by conscience; shockingly unfair or unjust.

Chapter Seventeen  
(Consulting For The Little Rock School District)

Roberts shares information about his consultation for the Little Rock School District and describes the lessons he learned during that stint. He writes about the difference between “obeying the law” and understanding the intent of the law in this chapter. The concept of the “national narrative” is presented here as well.

Study Questions for Chapter Seventeen

1. What was most significant about the encounter at the airport between Roberts and his former Central High classmate?
2. How was it different from the encounter with the classmate who was angry about the missed prom?
3. Why would Roberts describe the security team’s search as “Gestapo-like?”
4. What was the essence of the training plan developed by Roberts?
5. Roberts was told by one of the attorneys that “we will get due process, but not equal protection.” What did the attorney mean?
6. Put in your own words what Roberts may have been thinking as he gazed at the portraits in the courthouse.
7. Does the concept of a “National Narrative” make sense to you? Why? Why not?
8. It has often been said that we cannot legislate morality. What do you think that means?
9. The Little Rock School District was released from Federal supervision of its desegregation activities in 2002. Roberts’ tenure as a desegregation consultant ended that same year. What do you conclude about this coincidence?
10. Today Central High School has a student body that is roughly 85% black and Latino. In 1956 it was 100% white. What happened?

### **Vocabulary words: Chapter Seventeen**

- Anguish
- Cognitive
- Dissonance
- Intervening
- Mandatory
- Publicly

Anguish:

Extreme pain or distress of body or mind.

Cognitive:

Based on empirical factual knowledge.

Dissonance:

Lack of agreement between one's beliefs and one's actions.

Intervening:

Occurring between points of time or events.

Mandatory:

Containing or constituting a command; obligatory.

Publicly:

Visible by all who constitute a particular public; done openly.

Chapter Eighteen  
(Much To Learn)

Roberts invites readers to make a commitment to learning in this portion of the book. His urging that we all need to have a firm grasp of history, some sense of the dynamics of racism, and high level self-awareness is his way of asking for that commitment.

The question to consider: Am I willing to learn all I need to learn to be able to help erase the damaging lines of demarcation that continue to confound and confuse most Americans?

**Vocabulary words: Chapter Eighteen**

- Extrapolate
- Mundane
- Visceral

Extrapolate:

To project, extend, or expand (known data or experience) into an area not known or experienced so as to arrive at a conjectural knowledge of the unknown area; to predict by projecting past experience into current situations.

Mundane:

Characterized by the ordinary.

Visceral:

Dealing with crude or elemental emotions; felt in or as if in the viscera.

## Chapter Nineteen (Not A Linear Journey)

This chapter is reflective in nature as Roberts muses about the possibilities and choices we have even in the midst of those who hate us. His resolve never to allow others to define him is central to the presentation. Knowing about self is again highlighted as an essential aspect of growth and development. He ends the chapter with an invitation to the reader to join in the fight for racial equality and stating clearly that this is not an assignment for the weak of heart.

### Study Questions for Chapter Nineteen

1. Why was the young reporter so upset with Roberts?
2. What do you think Miles Davis meant by his response?
3. Roberts asks himself the question: “Why would I engage in any behavior that might interfere with my living a life of quality?” How would you answer this same question?
4. What is the real message you get when others talk to you?
5. Is it really possible to avoid hating others who do hateful things to you?
6. Roberts seems to feel that “we the people” can eradicate racism. Do you agree, or disagree with his notion?

### **Vocabulary words: Chapter Nineteen**

- Bondage
- Fluid
- Stint

**Bondage:**

A state of being bound usually by compulsion (as of law or mastery); servitude or subjugation to a controlling person or force.

**Fluid:**

Likely or tending to change or move.

**Stint:**

A definite quantity of work assigned; a specific time period of work.

## Afterword

The author suggests a context for thinking about the ways in which meaningful changes can be made in this country. The 335 year period between the landing at Plymouth Rock in 1619 to the United States Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 was characterized by constitutional support for discrimination based on racial group membership. That 335 year period has left an indelible imprint all over the landscape we now inhabit. The resulting systemic elements of racism are highly visible to the trained eye and the discerning mind.

One task facing teachers is that of assisting students in developing skills of critical thinking that will allow them to see with trained eyes and discerning minds. As this task is accomplished, more and more young people likely will be motivated to participate in the change process. Obviously, teachers will have to model this behavior as well.

Teachers, your opportunity is at hand!



Suggested Video Resources  
for  
“Lessons From Little Rock”

The following suggested resources will serve to help you give students a more comprehensive understanding of what happened in Little Rock and in other parts of the Civil Rights movement. This is not intended to be an exhaustive listing but the chosen selections are well suited to accompany a study of Lessons From little Rock.

(All selections are in DVD format)

Eyes On The Prize: America’s Civil Rights Movement

This PBS documentary chronicles the modern civil rights movement in America. You may be in a school that houses this collection in its library and if not, it is easily obtainable from a number of online sources. Volume two of the series contains the story of Little Rock. In this treatment you see the turmoil and hear the angry voices of those in opposition to the desegregation process. You learn also about some of the behind the scenes workers who helped to make this venture a successful enterprise.

With All Deliberate Speed: The Legacy of Brown v. Board (Zenger, 2003)

Directed by Sharon K. Baker and narrated by Blair Underwood, this presentation provides an in-depth look at Brown and the varied responses in the aftermath of the Court’s decision. Not all persons in America were happy about this ruling. Their fears and concerns are given voice along with an explanation of the rationale for the decision.

### The Road To Brown

This 1989 documentary highlights the contributions of Charles Hamilton Houston, one of the chief architects of the strategy developed to dismantle segregation by using legal challenges. Along with its message about the steps taken prior to Brown, students will learn how individual effort is so important in any social movement.

### Little Rock Central: 50 Years Later

In this HBO documentary produced by filmmaker brothers Craig and Brent Renaud, we see, graphically, how much work remains to be done in Little Rock and elsewhere in this country if integration is to be accomplished. This 2007 work provides a look inside Central High as it is today. One of the Little Rock Nine, Minnijean Brown Trickey, is featured in this documentary.

### The Ernest Green Story

Ernest Green was the lone senior of the Little Rock Nine in 1957. His story is presented by Disney in this treatment of his year in the school. Although there is clear evidence of some tweaking to make the story more compelling, it remains a rather honest portrayal of the agonizing year spent in Central for the Nine.