



## PROFILES IN COURAGE

Teacher's Guide

# PRUDENCE CRANDALL

### CREDITS:

Starring Janice Rule, John Ericson, King Donovan, Gloria Calomee, Ena Hartman, Ken Lynch, Anthony Call, and Robert F. Simon. Written by Andy Lewis. Directed by Alexander Singer. Produced by Gordon Oliver and Robert Saudek Associates. Inspired by John F. Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize-winning book. **50 minutes.** Guide prepared for Social Studies School Service by Robert D. Barnes, 1983.

### OBJECTIVES:

- To examine the status of women and blacks in 19th-century America.
- To review the development of equal educational opportunity for Americans.
- To understand the meaning of moral courage.

### PROLOGUE AND POSTSCRIPT:

Americans have never been completely sure of the depth of our national commitment to education, but our collective instincts, and often our leaders, have told us that educational opportunity for all must rank as a national priority.

In Massachusetts, in 1647, only 27 years after the arrival of the *Mayflower*, lawmakers prescribed that every town with at least 50 families had to hire a teacher of reading and writing and pay his wages; and the American concept of community rather than parental responsibility was initiated. In practice most students at the time were white, male, and middle or upper class.

The proceedings of The Massachusetts Historical Society in February 1873 state:

"More than one hundred and fifty years elapsed from the opening of the first public school in Massachusetts before one girl was admitted; and not until 1828... were girls admitted with full equality to the entire privileges of a thorough public education."

By the 1850s nearly all white boys and girls in America were entitled to a free elementary education, and by the 1860s white children, especially in the large cities, could attend free public high schools. In practice, however, tens of thousands of young people were at work in factories, mines, or on farms.

The *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision by the Supreme Court in 1896 sanctioned, especially in the South, dual societies—one black, one white—with the doctrine of "separate but equal." Black schools were seldom equal, and often did not even exist.

In 1954, a unanimous Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that America's public schools must end segregation "with all deliberate speed." As late as 1963, Governor George Wallace would stand in the doorway of the University of Alabama, a tax-supported public institution, and attempt to deny admission to two black students.

Today integrated public education is a reality all over our nation, yet educational issues continue to command the national attention. [What are some current issues being debated?]

### SYNOPSIS:

We watch Prudence Crandall, a Connecticut school teacher, insist on the right of every child, regardless of color, to an education. When Prudence admits a Negro girl to her exclusive girl's school in Canterbury, Connecticut, she is caught in a cross fire: The abolitionists would be pleased for her to become a martyr and other townspeople would be glad to see her gone. When white parents remove their daughters, Prudence "imports" black city girls to her school for "young ladies of color."

A Connecticut law sends Prudence to jail, but it is her neighbors she most fears. Prudence Crandall leaves Canterbury only after her school is vandalized and burned.

In 1886, 52 years after Prudence's school was destroyed, the citizens of Canterbury proclaimed:

"Mindful of the dark blot that rests upon our fair name, we desire a pension for Prudence Crandall, and request that her conviction be erased from the record."

#### VOCABULARY:

The following words and phrases appear in the program. Teachers may wish to check for student understanding:

tuition	full faith and credit
esteem	rail
deportment	propagandist
Quaker	girded our loins
martyr	sop
adultery	cuckold
dissension	jeopardy
rebellion	pensive
abolitionist	melancholy
hypocrites	guile
prudence	vindicated
atrocities	pension
conciliatory	

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What initial responses does Prudence make to Sarah's request for admission? Give specific examples? Why does she change her mind?
2. Reverend May is excited by the prospect of a confrontation with the community over Sarah's admission. Why? What is Prudence's attitude? Calvin's?
3. "We take great pride in you, Prudence," says Andrew Judson, representing the town council. What reminders does he give Prudence? Why? What is Judson's attitude toward the education of slaves? What was the law in the South at this time?
4. How does Sarah's father feel about Prudence's decision to advertise for "young ladies of color" from out of state? How would you describe Harris's attitude?
5. Identify the techniques used by the people of Canterbury to discourage Prudence. How have these, or similar techniques, been used in your community to discourage reformers?

6. Calvin asks, "Girl, do you like to suffer?" What motivates this question? What answer does Prudence give?

7. Calvin is well intentioned, but not as resolute as Prudence. What are the things that torment him? Is he a weak man, a poor husband? Support your position with examples.

8. Mr. Harris scorns both May and Judson: "Keep ye both away from me...ye are like to each other...ye look white together...I'll hate ye both together." What does he mean? Does he have a point?

#### ACTIVITY:

Many years ago an elementary school teacher in the Midwest initiated an experiment to give her young students a firsthand knowledge of discrimination. Segregating her students into two groups, brown eyes and blue eyes, she let her blue-eyed students know that they were "superior" and gave them special recognition and privileges. Later she reversed the roles. The results were disturbing and might have permanently damaged her students had she not been a skilled and loving teacher.

In your class try a lesson in "role reversal" This change in perspective may give you a deeper understanding of the point of view of another person. It might be a good idea to base the discrimination on some "impersonal" trait such as hair color, size, or position of the student's last name in the alphabet.

#### FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION:

1. Reporter Burleigh felt that the Connecticut law would be ruled unconstitutional, based on the "full faith and credit" clause. Find this clause in the U.S. Constitution (Article IV, Section 1). Conduct research to see how it is applied.
2. What were the concerns of the property owners in the vicinity of Prudence's school? Until the 1960s, many communities used "restrictive covenants" or "gentlemen's agreements" to prevent integration. Find out about these methods. Were they practiced in your community? What does federal law say today?