Beyond the Ruling

Why school desegregation was difficult to enforce

USH.6.1 "Describe the challenges involved with the enforcement of desegregation directives in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three actions that delayed or blocked desegregation, then number them 1 to 3 in the order they appear. Circle one action taken to move desegregation forward.

Opening the School Doors

1. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education that separating children in public schools by race violated the Constitution. The ruling struck down the legal basis for school segregation, but it did not send federal officials to every school. In 1955, the Court told school districts to desegregate with "all deliberate speed." Local school boards had to make plans, while federal judges reviewed disputes. That phrase gave districts room to claim they needed more time. Some boards assigned students by neighborhood or required transfers in ways that kept schools largely separated. Winning a ruling and changing daily school routines were different tasks.

2. In Little Rock, Arkansas, a federal court had approved a plan for nine Black students to enter Central High School in 1957. Governor Orval Faubus called out the Arkansas National Guard, which blocked them. Crowds also shouted threats, putting the students' safety at risk. A federal court ordered the Guard removed. When angry crowds still threatened the students, President Dwight Eisenhower sent federal troops and placed the Arkansas Guard under federal command. Soldiers escorted the students into school. Federal action opened the doors, but it could not erase harassment inside the building. The struggle involved state power, public hostility, and protection for students.

3. Other communities found ways to avoid integration without posting soldiers at school doors. In 1959, officials in Prince Edward County, Virginia, closed their public schools rather than operate integrated ones. Many white children attended private schools, while many Black children had no regular schooling. The closures lasted until 1964, when the Supreme Court ruled that the county could not deny public education to avoid desegregation. That same year, the Civil Rights Act gave the federal government stronger tools to challenge discrimination in schools. These events show why enforcing Brown required more than a court decision: officials had to confront delay, defiance, and unequal access to classrooms.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the phrase “all deliberate speed” make the Brown ruling harder to enforce?

2. In Little Rock, how did the governor and the crowds create different problems for enforcement?

3. Why did sending federal troops to Little Rock solve only part of the enforcement problem?

4. How was Prince Edward County’s response different from the blockade in Little Rock, and what did it mean for students?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise a school board in 1961 after a court orders it to desegregate. In 70 to 100 words, explain two different obstacles it may face, propose a practical response to each, and explain why a court order alone may not change students’ school days.

ANSWER KEY

Beyond the Ruling

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three actions that delayed or blocked desegregation, then number them 1 to 3 in the order they appear. Circle one action taken to move desegregation forward. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the phrase "all deliberate speed" make the Brown ruling harder to enforce?	**It gave school districts room to claim they needed more time, allowing them to delay desegregation.**
2	In Little Rock, how did the governor and the crowds create different problems for enforcement?	**The governor used the National Guard to block the students. Crowds threatened their safety, even after the Guard was removed.**
3	Why did sending federal troops to Little Rock solve only part of the enforcement problem?	**Troops escorted the students into school, but harassment continued inside the building.**
4	How was Prince Edward County's response different from the blockade in Little Rock, and what did it mean for students?	**Instead of blocking students at an open school, county officials closed the public schools. Many Black children had no regular schooling until the schools reopened.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

First, board members may try to delay by saying they need more time to assign students. The board should publish a clear enrollment schedule and report its progress to the federal court. Second, crowds may threaten students entering a school. Local officials should protect the students, and federal authorities may need to step in if state officials refuse. A court order states what the law requires, but students still need safe entrances, real classroom placements, and officials willing to carry out the plan.

Accept other passage-supported obstacles, including school closures or enrollment rules that preserve separation. Responses should connect each obstacle to a plausible action and distinguish a legal ruling from its enforcement.