The Classroom Door

Examine a court decision about American Indian students and public schools.

OKH.C.6.2.B "Examine the judicial decision of Dorothy Sunrise v. Cache Consolidated School District regarding integrated access to public education by American Indians."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the district's reason for excluding Dorothy Sunrise, circle the court's decision, and number two limits on what the decision could accomplish. Use your marks to distinguish legal access from students' experiences at school.

Dorothy Sunrise and the Right to Attend

1. In Oklahoma, a nearby public school was not always open to every child. American Indian children could face barriers to attending school alongside other children in their communities. Dorothy Sunrise, an American Indian student, became the focus of a dispute with Cache Consolidated School District over access to its public school. The district sought to keep her from attending because she was American Indian. The conflict raised a question with immediate consequences for Sunrise and other children: Could a district that offered public education refuse a student on that basis? The answer would determine whether the school door was open to her.

2. Sunrise and her family challenged her exclusion in court. They argued that a public school could not treat an American Indian child as ineligible simply because of her identity. The district's position would have kept Sunrise apart from the other students at its public school. The court ruled in Sunrise's favor and rejected the district's effort to bar her. Under the ruling, being American Indian was not, by itself, a lawful reason to deny a child admission to that public school. This was a decision about the right to enter a public school, not a finding that every student inside it received equal treatment.

3. The decision mattered beyond Sunrise's own school day. It established that the district could not use American Indian identity to shut a student out of its public school. But the ruling did not end every form of school segregation, and it could not guarantee that Sunrise or other American Indian students would be welcomed by classmates and teachers. A legal right to attend and a fair experience after entering are related, but they are not the same. The case shows both the power and the limits of a judicial decision: a court could reject an exclusionary rule without controlling every interaction in a classroom.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What reason did the district use to exclude Sunrise, and what question did that raise for the court?

2. How did the court's decision answer the district's attempt to keep Sunrise out?

3. Why would the ruling matter to American Indian children other than Sunrise?

4. What could this decision change, and what could it not guarantee about a student's school experience?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A nearby district proposes barring American Indian students from its public school because they are American Indian. Write a four- or five-sentence recommendation to its school board that applies the Sunrise ruling, explains one limit of the ruling, and proposes one additional step the district could take.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.6.2.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the district's reason for excluding Dorothy Sunrise, circle the court's decision, and number two limits on what the decision could accomplish. Use your marks to distinguish legal access from students' experiences at school. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What reason did the district use to exclude Sunrise, and what question did that raise for the court?	**The district sought to exclude Sunrise because she was American Indian. The court had to decide whether a public school could refuse her admission on that basis.**
2	How did the court's decision answer the district's attempt to keep Sunrise out?	**The court ruled for Sunrise. American Indian identity alone was not a lawful reason to deny her admission to the district's public school.**
3	Why would the ruling matter to American Indian children other than Sunrise?	**It established that the district could not use American Indian identity to exclude a student from its public school.**
4	What could this decision change, and what could it not guarantee about a student's school experience?	**It could secure legal access to the public school, but it could not guarantee that students would be welcomed or treated fairly once inside.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The school board should reject the proposal to bar American Indian students. In the Sunrise case, the court ruled that American Indian identity alone was not a lawful reason to deny admission to a public school. That ruling protects access, but it cannot guarantee that students will be treated fairly after they enter. The district should also review how it responds when students report unfair treatment at school.

Accept responses that accurately distinguish the court's decision on admission from students' treatment after admission. For Part 3, the additional step should address school experience rather than replace the legal right to attend.