



ENGLISH

The Nine Who Dared

VERSION

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TheatreEspresso 

The Nine Who Dared

In September of 1957, a group of nine African-American students were the first to enroll in previously all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Although segregation had been ruled unconstitutional in the Supreme Court case of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, many communities in the South were reluctant to open their doors to African-American students. Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus ordered the National Guard to prevent the “Little Rock Nine” from entering the building on their first day of school. He was eventually overruled by President Eisenhower, who sent troops from the 101st Airborne to safely escort the students to Central High.

What Happened?



Once enrolled, the nine students faced daily harassment, but were trained not to react to the constant insults and abuse. After months of being tormented, one of the students, Minnijean Brown, decided to fight back and was expelled from school.

Violence and discrimination against African Americans in Little Rock had increased as a result of school desegregation. Members of the community were conflicted about what to do next. Some believed that integration should be postponed for the safety of the students and the greater community. Others strongly believed that the students must stay in school, no matter what sacrifices had to be made.

Minnijean's act of defiance sets the stage for Theatre Espresso's production of *The Nine Who Dared*. In the play, you will act as members of the Little Rock community. You will view a dramatization of the events, interview characters, debate the issues with your classmates and determine whether the remaining eight students should return to Central High immediately or wait until September in hopes that the violence will subside.

Questions to consider

- When the students do go back, what actions should school administrators and elected officials take to help protect them?
- What coping strategies should the eight students adopt in the face of harassment?
- What risks are worth taking in order to end injustice?
- Should young people be asked to risk their safety and emotional well-being for the sake of an important cause?

Arguments for returning to school

Arguments against returning to school

Changes that need to be made if the eight students return

May 17, 1954: The United States Supreme Court rules that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision. Five days later, the Little Rock School Board announces that it will begin desegregation in compliance with the Court's decision.

May 24, 1955: The Little Rock School Board votes to adopt the Superintendent Virgil Blossom's plan of gradual integration, beginning with the high school level in September 1957. Lower grades would be integrated over the next six years.

Spring 1957: Eighty of the 517 Black students living in the Central High district express an interest in attending the school. After interviews with the Superintendent and staff, 17 students are selected. Eight students later decide to stay at the all-Black Horace Mann High School.

August 27, 1957: Seeking to prevent African American students from enrolling at Central High in September, the Mother's League of Central High School files a motion for a temporary injunction against integration.

August 30, 1957: Federal Judge Ronald Davies orders the School Board to proceed with its desegregation plan.

September 2, 1957: Governor Orval Faubus calls upon the Arkansas National Guard to surround Central High, prohibiting African American students from entering the school. In a televised speech, he declares that this move is to prevent violence and keep the peace.

September 3, 1957: Judge Davies orders that Central High School must be desegregated.

September 20, 1957: Judge Ronald Davies rules that Faubus has used the National Guard to prevent integration, not preserve the peace. On Davies' orders, Faubus removes the Guard.

September 23, 1957: Nine African American students are escorted into Central High, while an angry mob of over 1,000 protesters gather outside. Before the end of their first day of school, the nine Black students are removed from the school by police officers for their safety.

September 25, 1957: Under orders from President Eisenhower, 1200 members of the 101st Airborne Division escort the nine students back into Central High for their first full day of classes.

December 1957: After being taunted by white male students, Minnijean Brown dumps a bowl of chili on one of the students and is suspended for six days. She is later expelled for a subsequent altercation and transfers to New Lincoln High School in New York City.



1. Over three years passed between the Brown v. Board of Education decision and the integration of Central High. What are some possible reasons why the Little Rock Superintendent decided on a “gradual integration” of the schools?
2. Of the students initially chosen to enroll in Central High, many decided to stay at Horace Mann instead? Why do you think those students decided to stay at an all African-American school?
3. Governor Faubus was initially supportive of integration. He stated that the reason he prevented Black students from entering Central High was for their safety. What other reasons might have caused him to take this action?
4. Why do you think Minnijean Brown received such a strong punishment for her actions?

Brown v. Board of Education: the 1954 landmark Supreme Court decision that mandated the integration of public schools.

Segregation: the separation of a specific racial, religious, or other group from the general body of society.

Civil Rights: the rights to full legal, social, and economic equality extended to African Americans.

Lynching: putting a person to death by mob action without due process of law.

National Guard: a dual State-Federal military force that can be called upon to protect citizens and their property in times of emergency. The National Guard can also be deployed to serve the U.S. abroad during times of war or crisis. Each state has command over its own National Guard, but shares that authority with the Federal government.

NAACP: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People founded in 1909. Its mission is “to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons, and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination.”



President Dwight D. Eisenhower

DAISY BATES, president of the Arkansas NAACP, provided guidance and support to the Little Rock Nine. In the fall of 1957, her home became the headquarters for those working to integrate Central High.

MINNIJEAN BROWN, one of the Little Rock Nine, was suspended and later expelled for retaliating against the students who harassed her during her first year at Little Rock High. She transferred to New York's New Lincoln School, where she graduated in 1959. She became a social activist and served in the Clinton Administration as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Workforce Diversity.

ELIZABETH ECKFORD is remembered for facing the angry mob outside of Central High all alone on September 4, 1957. After Little Rock schools were closed in 1958, she joined the U.S. Army and earned her G.E.D. She returned to Little Rock in 1960 and later attended Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio.

ERNEST GREEN, a senior when he entered Little Rock High in 1957, was the first African American student to graduate from the school. He earned a bachelor's and master's degree from Michigan State University, after which he worked as the Assistant Secretary of Housing and Urban Affairs under the Carter Administration.



Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus (speaking)

ORVAL FAUBUS, Governor of Arkansas (1955-67). In 1957, citing public safety concerns, he defied the Supreme Court's decision to integrate schools by ordering the Arkansas National Guard to prevent African American students from entering Central High.

ELIZABETH PAISLEY HUCKABY, a vice principal at Central High School, was responsible for shepherding the female Black students through their first year at the school. She was a believer in integration, stating that "no public school system segregated by law on the basis of race is consistent with democracy."



Students meeting the mayor of New York City

CARLOTTA WALLS LANIER, the youngest of the Little Rock Nine, returned to Central High when it reopened. She received her bachelor's degree from Colorado State College, and later founded a real estate brokerage firm.

MELBA PATILLO, a junior when she entered Little Rock High in 1957. She later became a journalist and wrote an autobiography entitled, *Warriors Don't Cry*.

GLORIA CECILIA RAY was a sophomore when she enrolled at Central High School. Her mother, who worked for the State of Arkansas, was fired by Governor Faubus for refusing to withdraw Gloria from Central High School. They moved to Missouri the following year. Gloria graduated from Kansas City Central High School and later became an attorney.

TERENCE ROBERTS, a sophomore when he enrolled at Central High, moved to Los Angeles, California to complete his high school education. He received his Ph.D. in psychology from Southern Illinois University and serves on numerous boards, including the Little Rock Nine Foundation.

JEFFERSON THOMAS, a sophomore when he entered Central High School, graduated from the school in 1960 and went on to work as an accountant for the U.S. Department of Defense.

THELMA MOTHERSHED, one of the Little Rock Nine, completed her junior year at Central High School in 1958. After Central High closed, she continued her education through summer school and correspondence courses, went to college, and earned a master's degree in Guidance and Counseling from Southern Illinois University.

As members of the Little Rock community, you will have the opportunity to ask questions of the following key players. Write down some questions that you may ask.

Daisy Bates:

Ernest Green:

Melba Patillo:

Vice Principal Huckaby:



Members of the 101st Airborne Division escort students into Central High

TheatreEspresso performs at the John Adams Courthouse in Boston (in collaboration with the Supreme Judicial Court), at the Lawrence Heritage State Park Visitors Center, and in schools and museums throughout New England. The company thanks Mass Humanities and the following foundations for their generous support.



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Since 1992, **TheatreEspresso** has toured its educational dramas to schools, museums, libraries, and courthouses throughout New England. **TheatreEspresso's** work challenges students to make critical judgments, explore social relationships, reflect on the role of law and human rights in our society, and question accepted truths about the history of America. These plays confront students with complex situations, based on actual historical events, that provoke a variety of opinions and solutions. By asking students to consider themselves participants in the drama, the company engages students in examining contradictory events and testimony in order to reach their decisions.

TheatreEspresso does not advocate any one viewpoint, but hopes to compel students to relate historical events to contemporary issues. **TheatreEspresso** is in residence at Wheelock Family Theatre.



For further information, visit our website at
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