

# Hear My Voice! Teaching Difficult Subjects with Graphic Organizers

Kim E. Barbieri

In early 2010, I was preparing to write what has become my now annual proposal for the NCSS national conference. Discovering that the conference theme of that year was “Vistas, Visions, and Voices,” I was captivated—especially by the concept of “voices.” As education specialist at the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, I spend many hours in the research room, where I am always “awed” by the instructive qualities of the voices of history. They emerge rich, vibrant, and still relevant from the tens of millions of pages in our archives—a living link to the people, events, and issues of decades long since faded from our national memory. Satisfied to have found the “hook” for my proposal, I began thinking about novel ways to use these historical treasures to teach students by harnessing the voices of the past—especially about topics as perennially thorny as race relations.

From years of observing participants in our experiential-learning program, *Five Star Leaders*, at the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, we have formulated some conclusions about teaching difficult issues. Specifically, the “Crisis at Little Rock” scenario requires that students tackle, head on, issues of racism, segregation, civil unrest, open defiance of the federal courts, and more, all the while focusing on the unfolding school integration crisis at Little Rock’s Central High School in 1957. With this program we have witnessed, firsthand, the effectiveness of student-centered learning and the capacity of original documents to provide historical context, communicate deep understanding, and bring a contemporary, real-time, “feel” to historical issues. Role playing historical characters opens the door naturally to an exploration of multiple perspectives; it lends authenticity and introduces that all-

important personal connection. *Five Star Leaders*, however, is a comprehensive onsite program requiring a substantial investment of time—and certainly well worth it!—but, too often, time is a commodity in short supply in today’s classroom.

Graphic organizers are immensely popular—and much utilized—in many classrooms, particularly at the elementary level. These creative and innovative teaching tools are a very effective addition to the teaching repertoire and may be designed to maximize precious class time. For the secondary social studies teacher, their instant appeal and universal application translates into a dynamic learning tool, empowering students in their efforts to interpret historical context and perspectives within a limited timeframe. The challenge: to design a student-friendly template, infused with a thoughtful, yet straight-forward, process for engaging and guiding student exploration

and interpretation of historical content in primary source documents. A well-designed graphic organizer should also aid students in communicating effectively what they learned to others and, at the same time, make learning fun.

“Hear My Voice—A People in Conflict,” is a graphic organizer that addresses each of these learning goals. It invites students to step into the shoes of a real person who experienced a particular event in the past and left behind a tangible piece of the historical puzzle. Original documents in hand, students approach the tasks of the graphic organizer as though they were the documents’ authors. Later, each student will “give voice” to this individual, using the information compiled in the organizer as a very useful and practical oral presentation outline. For the secondary social studies teacher, the real beauty of a graphic organizer is that it is a powerful learning tool, which immediately focuses attention, prompts thinking, and is relatively self-guided. With minor revisions, “Hear My Voice!” can be used to introduce any number of “difficult subjects” into the classroom.

## Procedures

1. Provide each student with the graphic organizer and a primary source document—a letter, telegram, diary entry, speech, or oral history transcript excerpt.

## “HEAR MY VOICE!” — A People in Conflict

**What I said**—“QUOTE”

**My name is**—

**The date is**—

**The place is**—

**What I believe**—SUMMARIZE your viewpoint in one sentence.

**All about me**—List FACTS that describe you.

**Why I believe**—PARAPHRASE your key arguments.

**ON THE ISSUE OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION**

**I am**—

Mark with an “X”

<b>PRO</b>	<b>UNDECIDED</b>	<b>CON</b>
------------	------------------	------------

\*Teachers may wish to assign some pre- or post-activity research to complete this listing of facts.

Ideally, the documents are a faithful representation of viewpoints prevalent in public thinking and discourse on the issue at the time. Depending on the abilities of your students, allow approximately 30–50 minutes to read and analyze the documents and complete the graphic organizer. Included within this article are two sample documents that illustrate just how effectively these “voices” communicate a wealth of knowledge about the broad spectrum of beliefs and attitudes about racial segregation in mid-twentieth-century America. At the end of this article is a list of sources for acquiring a wide variety of documents created by public officials, history makers, and anonymous Americans.

2. Direct students to examine their document. They will be prompted by the graphic organizer to make note of the date and place—if the document contains this—and to assemble some background

information about the author, either from the document itself or through some quick online research.

3. Emphasize to students that they are to select an appropriate quotation from their document, summarize the author’s viewpoint in one concisely written sentence, and paraphrase the author’s key supporting rationale. At the conclusion of the document analysis, students will use the graphic organizer to help them make a final assessment of the author’s perspective on the issue of school integration. They should be able to answer the following questions: What is the author’s viewpoint? Is he or she in support of, opposed to, or undecided on the issue of school integration?

4. As a wrap-up activity, require each student to reveal their author’s “voice” to classmates, by using the wealth of information that now populates the graphic

organizer. Tell students to stand and, using the graphic organizer as an outline, assume the personae of their document’s author. Encourage classmates to listen to each other attentively, and invite them to rate one another, using a suggested scale of 1–5 for each of the following categories: thoroughness, quality of content, dramatic believability, and personal persuasiveness in presenting this unique historical perspective. [Note that their ratings should not reflect whether they agree or disagree with the perspective presented.]

### A Note about Presidential Bulk Mail

For illustrative purposes, this article features two letters written by ordinary citizens to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, explaining their feelings and opinions about the Little Rock Crisis in the autumn of 1957.

*continued on page 306*

10/7/57

Oklahoma City, Okla.  
October 9th, 1957

Dwight Eisenhower  
President  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

Your use of Federal Troops at Little Rock, Arkansas is viewed with dismay. As a constituent I have never written a letter to a politician or statesman before. I have been a good Republican and wholeheartedly supported you in your two previous elections. I am the Mother of three children and have not heretofore been particularly concerned on the school integration question; however, I am against it now. Our separate neighborhood sections here in Oklahoma have attributed to the fact that we have not encountered serious difficulty in relation to announced integration of schools which I feel is comparative to other Northern sections of the country.

In view of my previous agreement with the moderation view supporting the principles of integration, I now wonder if any principles ever existed excepting the desire of politicians to incite race hate and gain more Negro votes in strategic areas of our country where this vote might normally be of value in an election.

We get along since the 18th. Amendment was appealed and the local or state option system appears satisfactory to all concerned. If you would advocate letting the people decide the racial situation either in their own communities or nationally through the ballot boxes instead of with guns and bayonets, we might get back to our old and good system of government.

It is very improbable that this letter will ever come to your attention, Mr. President; however, it would do well for party statisticians to note the possible en-masse defection of good Republicans from the folds of party alignment.

Respectively yours,

*Jane Adkins*  
Mrs. Jane Adkins  
2244 SW 49th,  
Oklahoma City, Okla.

Ja/

9-  
ca

10/15

U. S. NAVAL COMMUNICATION STATION

Navy Number 128 (one two eight)  
Fleet Post Office  
San Francisco, California

10-3 Pm

Attention: OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Mr. President:

My name is Charles Alexander. I am a member of the United States Armed Forces. My race is Negro, and I am eighteen years of age.

The purpose of this letter is to find out, first hand, what is being done about the situation now at hand, in the south concerning the intregation problem. This is very important to me because it concerns the welfare of my people, and of the United States. I am but eighteen years of age, and yet I am willing to lay down my life in the defense of a country where my people are not even wanted; I feel very self-conscious about this.

Here in the navy, where both white and others are living together, the problem is still the same, with insults coming from right and left.

When I came into the navy I was eager to do my best and get ahead. I have lived in California all my life and have never been confronted with anything like this before. It is not because I am a Negro that I feel this way, It is because I have a sense of decency and feel that I should do all that is in my power to correct the awful mistakes so many people are making on both sides.

When two people of different races can't live together something has to be done or dâsaster follows; and I feel that it is reaching the disaster point now.

The Declaration Of Independence states that every man has rights, it doesn't include that his skin must be white to receive them.



Address reply to  
Postal Officer,  
Navy Post Office  
Navy No. 128.

United States Navy  
NAVY POST OFFICE  
Navy No. 128 (one two eight)  
Fleet Post Office  
San Francisco, California

Mr. President I can't express clearly enough how I feel about this. People being abused because of the color of their skin is not only unconstitutional and indecent, but is a threat to all humanity and an open invitation for communists and fascists to move in. If a group of people can't find protection and leadership in their own government they look elsewhere for it.

Something like this could very easily lead to another civil war, with the people of the United States fighting among themselves; other countries would lose confidence in the leadership of this country and things could very easily end up in chaos. I know that this is probably not the only letter you've received pertaining to this problem, but as I've stated above, I feel that I should do all in my power to correct before there is any more bloodshed. I sincerely hope that this letter will have some effect upon the actions taken by the government.

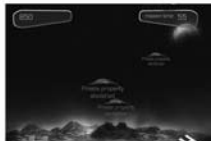
Sincerely,

*Charles Alexander*  
Charles Alexander

# Celebrate Bill of Rights Day!

## Online Educational Resources Include:

- \* **New Video on the Rule of Law - Does the Bill of Rights mean anything without the rule of law?**
- \* **Flash game - Students will defend their inalienable rights from attack!**
- \* **Life Without the Bill of Rights? - Asks students how life would change without the Bill of Rights.**



Explore engaging and accurate resources for Bill of Rights Day today at [www.BillofRightsInstitute.org](http://www.BillofRightsInstitute.org)



200 North Glebe Road, Suite 200, Arlington, VA 22203  
(800) 838-7870 [www.BillofRightsInstitute.org](http://www.BillofRightsInstitute.org)



*In the beautiful mountains of Northern New Mexico*  
**Dar al Islam Teachers' Institute**  
*23rd Annual Residential Institute for Educators*

## Understanding and Teaching About Islam

Teach about Islam more effectively by understanding the world view of Islam through the study of principal texts, through open discourse with academic and traditional scholars, and through interaction with Muslims.

*Visit us during the NCSS conference at booth # 427 in the International Alley*

***Application Deadline: April 1, 2012***

Participants pay for travel to New Mexico.



July 7-18, 2012  
Abiquiu, New Mexico

**<http://daralislam.org/programs/education/teachers-institute.aspx>**

Rehana Shafi, Director  
UMBC  
1000 Hilltop Circle  
Academic Services Building, Room 106C  
Baltimore, MD 21250  
[InstituteDirector@daralislam.org](mailto:InstituteDirector@daralislam.org)

## HEAR MY VOICE *from page 302*

One is from a mother of three children in Oklahoma City. She is clearly upset about the president's use of federal troops—so much so that it has altered her formerly positive view on school integration. The second, a particularly poignant letter, comes from an 18-year-old African American sailor based in San Francisco. The young man argues a strong case, laying out the irreconcilable contradictions between the basic principles of the American creed and the practice of racial segregation. Other examples of bulk mail letters include one from a woman living in the Territory of Hawaii (This is 1957!) who details her life experience observing the shattering effects of racial and ethnic prejudice. Another, "very unexpected," letter was written by Byron De La Beckwith, who decades later was convicted of the 1963 murder of civil rights activist Medgar Evers. Equipped with the hindsight of the present, the open threats and references to violence that emerge from this letter have an eerie prescience.

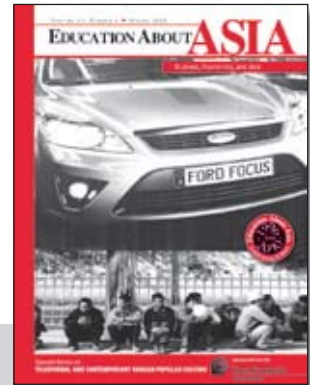
Letters like these were reviewed by the president's staff to gauge public opinion and each received a dutiful reply from the Eisenhower White House. Eventually, 60 boxes of citizens' letters, on the topic of President Eisenhower's decision to send federal troops to Little Rock, would find a home in the "bulk mail" collection of the Eisenhower Presidential Library. As sources of historical information, the letters are a veritable primer on just how complex and fractious was this issue in 1957. The range of viewpoints and variations on common themes are quite remarkable in their abundance and extremely useful in developing a sophisticated understanding of this contentious and complicated chapter of United States history.

The Little Rock Crisis letters hail from all regions and states of the Union; the opinions represent all points along the political spectrum. The authors represent all age groups—from school children to senior citizens—and a wide variety of racial and ethnic groups. A collection of these



### Education About Asia

A unique and innovative magazine, *Education About Asia* is a practical teaching resource for secondary school, college, and university instructors, as well as an invaluable source of information for all students who have an interest in Asia. To review subscription information, the table of contents for all issues, selected articles, as well as information on the Association for Asian Studies, please visit [www.asian-studies.org](http://www.asian-studies.org).



#### FOCUS ON ASIA: JAPAN'S DEMOCRACY

special two-part series (spring and winter 2011)

Government and political science instructors who want to improve their student's understanding of democratic government and encourage global perspectives on civic literacy can effectively utilize the study of Japan, Asia's oldest democracy, in their classrooms. The spring and winter 2011 issues of *Education About Asia* will include a two-part "Focus on Asia: Japan's Democracy" series. "Japan's Democracy" will offer feature articles and resource essays that should provide instructors illumination about a variety of aspects of Japanese democracy. Much of the content will also include a US-Japan comparative focus.

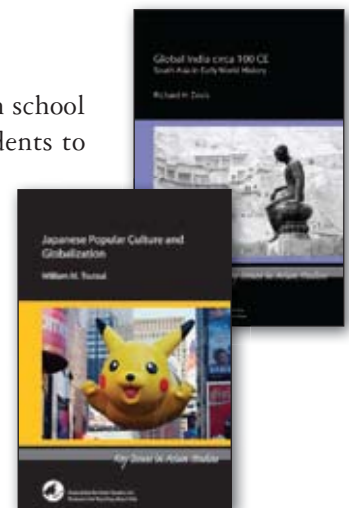
Multiple copies of these issues can be ordered at a discount for classroom use at [www.asian-studies.org](http://www.asian-studies.org).

*Funding generously provided by the United States-Japan Foundation.*

### Key Issues in Asian Studies

"KEY ISSUES IN ASIAN STUDIES" booklets are designed for use in senior high school and undergraduate humanities and survey courses. These booklets introduce students to major cultural and historical themes and are designed to encourage classroom debate and discussion. The AAS plans to publish 2–3 booklets each year. Please visit the AAS website for a list of forthcoming titles.

- Japan and Imperialism, 1853–1945, James L. Huffman
- Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization, William M. Tsutsui
- Global India circa 100 CE, Richard H. Davis
- Caste in India, Diane P. Mines
- Understanding East Asia's Economic "Miracles", Zhiqun Zhu
- Gender, Sexuality, and Body Politics in Modern Asia, Michael G. Peletz
- Political Rights in Post-Mao China, Merle Goldman



All "Key Issues" booklets are \$10 (\$8 for AAS members)

letters for classroom use is included in the “Sources for Documents” section following this article. One word of caution, however; some of the letters are clearly inappropriate for student use, especially with regard to the dramatic class presentations. The language used and ideas expressed run the gamut, from hate-filled rants to purely disgusting vileness. Rather, you may wish to use your judgment to introduce features of some of these letters to students once they have com-

pleted their own research and presentations and have a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

### Learning Activities or Assessments

There are any number of ways to either extend this lesson or to assess student learning. If nothing else, the suggestions listed below should provide a springboard for the teacher’s own creativity and possibly satisfy some state learning standards.

Projects should require students to apply what they have learned at a relatively high, yet meaningful and interesting, level.

1. Instruct students to write a reaction letter (300–350 words) addressed to the author of the document they analyzed. In this way, students have an opportunity to demonstrate their grasp of historical content and context, multiple perspectives, and nuanced understanding of an issue that was very controversial in 1957. Additionally, in crafting the reaction letter, students use critical thinking skills to revisit the content, beliefs, and arguments in order to draw personal conclusions on the subject and contribute their own “voice” to the dialogue.
2. Based on the document they read and analyzed, assign students to write three original questions. Ask them to complete research to answer these questions. Lastly, provide an opportunity for students to share their findings with classmates just as professional historians do.
3. Challenge students to create an original slide presentation, based on their findings and conclusions that can be used to teach other students about segregation and school integration in 1957. Ask them to compare race relations of the mid-twentieth century with those in the present.

### Conclusions

As social studies teachers, we play an increasingly critical role in preparing our students to deal responsibly and effectively with difficult issues. Yet today, perhaps more than ever before, teachers are understandably hesitant to introduce controversy into their classrooms. The answer, however, is not to avoid classroom discussions of difficult issues, but rather to transform our classrooms into engaging laboratories for dynamic social studies learning. The combining of primary source documents and graphic organizers is one useful method for accomplishing this goal. Graphic organizers artfully guide student inquiry, critical thinking, and historical interpretation, and original documents are

## THE CHOICES PROGRAM

*Curriculum Resources for High School Social Studies*

### FOSTER 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS

Critical Thinking

Media & Technology Literacy

Global Awareness

Collaboration

Creativity and Innovation



THE CHOICES PROGRAM  
at Brown University

Visit our web site  
for lessons, videos and a full curriculum catalog

**WWW.CHOICES.EDU**

*Explore the Past, Shape the Future*



ready resources that richly illustrate and bring to life controversies faced by past generations. It is a powerful combination!

Unlike with contemporary issues, the passage of time allows us to examine past controversies more objectively and honestly under the microscope of academic scrutiny. Documents examined within this framework offer compelling case studies for students to discover that free societies have always grappled with difficult subjects. In fact, dealing with them in responsible and productive ways in the public square is the cornerstone of civic engagement—one of the tenets of a self-governing people. Providing students with frameworks for productive discussion, tools and skills for civic engagement, and expectations for thoughtful and civil discourse is, without a doubt, the highest calling of any social studies teacher. 📺

#### Sources For Documents

1. The Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum [www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online\\_documents.html](http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents.html)

Civil Rights - *Brown vs. Board of Education*

Civil Rights Act of 1957

Civil Rights - Little Rock School Integration

Civil Rights - Citizen's Letters on the Little Rock Crisis

Civil Rights - Eisenhower & the Eisenhower Administration

Civil Rights - Emmett Till Case

2. DocsTeach from the National Archives [www.docsteach.org](http://www.docsteach.org)
3. Teaching With Documents: Documents Related to *Brown v. Board of Education*, National Archives and Records Administration [www.archives.gov/education/lessons/brown-v-board/](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/brown-v-board/)
4. Education Resources on School Desegregation: National Archives and Records Administration [www.archives.gov/midatlantic/education/desegregation/index.html](http://www.archives.gov/midatlantic/education/desegregation/index.html)
5. Video-taped Oral Histories of the Little Rock Nine from the National Park Service [www.nps.gov/chsc/historyculture/oral-history.htm](http://www.nps.gov/chsc/historyculture/oral-history.htm)
6. Digital Collections: University of Arkansas Libraries <http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/>
7. Oral history interview with Joseph Asher Rabbi Joseph Asher, formerly of Temple Emanuel here in Greensboro, North Carolina, about his experiences in Greensboro in the early 1960s. <http://library.uncg.edu/depts/archives/civrights/detail-iv.asp?iv=15>
8. Oral History Interview with Daisy Bates, October 11, 1976. Interview G-0009. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007). <http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/G-0009/menu.html>
9. Oral History Interview with Orval Faubus, June 14, 1974. Interview A-0031. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007). <http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/A-0031/menu.html>
10. Oral History Interview with Vivion Lenon Brewer, October 15, 1976. Interview G-0012.

Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007). <http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/G-0012/menu.html>

#### Additional Resources

1. Examples of Jim Crow Laws, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site <http://academic.udayton.edu/race/02rights/jcrow02.htm>
2. From *Plessy v. Ferguson* to *Brown v. Board of Education*: The Supreme Court Rules on School Desegregation, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute [www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1982/3/82.03.06.x.html](http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1982/3/82.03.06.x.html)
3. The Civil Rights Era—Library of Congress <http://>

[lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aohtml/exhibit/aopart9.html](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aohtml/exhibit/aopart9.html)

4. History of *Charles C. Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*, VA, ParkNet, National Park Service [www.nps.gov/history/nr/twhp/www/ps/lessons/104newkent/104facts1.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/twhp/www/ps/lessons/104newkent/104facts1.htm)

**KIM E. BARBIERI** has worked in the field of education for 36 years. Today, she is an education specialist with the National Archives and Records Administration. A former middle school and high school teacher, she develops educational programming at the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum in Abilene, Kansas.

# Pare Lorentz's Reel History

## USING DOCUMENTS AND DOCUMENTARIES IN THE CLASSROOM

**Pare Lorentz** created groundbreaking documentary films for the Roosevelt Administration's New Deal programs. Lorentz believed that film holds enormous potential for advancing social justice and education.

**Now educators have free, easy access to an online, comprehensive resource collection through the Pare Lorentz Center at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library.** These tools include:

- **FDR: Day by Day Online Interactive Educational Timeline & Website**  
Provides a multimedia resource chronology for each day of the Roosevelt Presidency.
- **Video Curriculum Guides**  
Lorentz's own films and other public archival footage are edited into short segments and combined with primary source documents to enhance students' understanding of important Roosevelt era topics and events.
- **Distance Learning/Video Conferencing Opportunities**  
Connect your classroom to the Library's Education Specialist, documents, artifacts and still and video film images.
- **FDR Presidential Library and Museum channel on YouTube.com**  
Find newsreels and other related historical material on YouTube.

For more information contact our Education Specialist at [Jeffrey.Urbin@nara.gov](mailto:Jeffrey.Urbin@nara.gov). The first 100 respondents who mention *Social Education* will receive a FREE gift from the Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.

THE PARE LORENTZ CENTER AT  
THE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT  
PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY  
[parelorentzcenter.org](http://parelorentzcenter.org)

