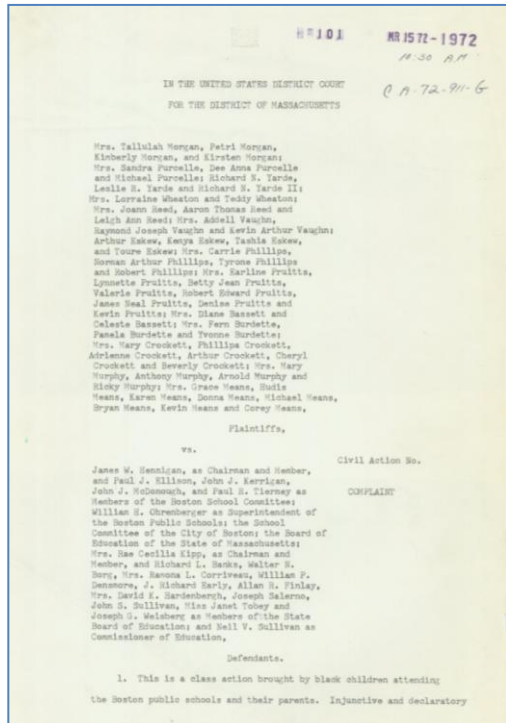


Teach the Constitution; it's the law!
Using Primary Sources to Teach the Constitution.

*This is a class action brought by black children
attending the Boston public schools and their parents.*

Mrs. Tallulah Morgan with a group of other parents complains that the school committee in her city has deliberately denied her child access to experienced teachers and adequate school supplies and facilities; she is African American. It is 1972, and by the time the courts have finished, this effort to achieve equal rights under the Constitution has become a landmark case.

At the National Archives at Boston, we use documents from our holdings to teach teachers and students about the Constitution, employing specific records to illustrate the evolution of our thinking, our enforcement of the Constitution, and our understandings of “unalienable rights” and “created equal.” We



use these records from the past to encourage examination of the present: the Amistad case (1839), Lewis Hayden’s arrest for harboring fugitive slaves; American-born Catherine Hogan’s application to be repatriated as a US Citizen after she lost her citizenship when she married an Irishman; Mr. Halladjian’s appeal to be a citizen despite his dark (Armenian) skin; an parent’s concern (in 1890) that his pre-adolescent child has access to pornography by mail. . . These real-life applications of the Constitution enable the students to explore, analyze, make connections, discuss the Big Ideas, and respond to the essential questions posed by our Constitution.

One of our most powerful cases is Morgan v. Hennigan, United States District Court Civil Action Case File No. 72-911-G, the Boston Schools desegregation case. It occupies 54 cubic feet of storage in the National Archives at Boston, and it details all sides of the arguments, the court’s opinion, evidence of the school climate and facilities, even the numbers of police (there were 1792) present on the first day

of school in 1975, and the struggle to find the best way to free Boston’s schools of the effects of segregative intent.

In our Learning Center, we discuss the historical and legislative background of racial equality, civil rights, and specifically, school integration. We hand out sets of 12 documents to groups of 4 students. Using guiding questions (scaffolding), they discover the story and the context of the times. We talk about how it was “back in the day” and how school is now. Studying Morgan v. Hennigan is interesting not only because teachers and parents remember it; it raises issues pertinent to the present. Why did this happen? Could anything have been done differently? How do we face segregation and racism in our class, school, and town today? How do we create a better learning environment for our children? What can we as

teachers and students do to make the next generation better than we are? How can we make the world a better place for everybody?

In our experience, using primary source documents to teach the Constitution has far-reaching implications. They become the jumping off point for discussion, for writing and activities, and for examination of far more than our Constitution—**our selves**, our community, and our country.

And that's partly why we study the Constitution.

Teaching the Constitution is important, and federal law H.R. 4818, section 111(b) requires that every public school teacher teaches the Constitution on Constitution Day, September 17th each year. Teaching the Constitution is not hard. It's only four pages long; it's been changed only 27 times. As a preschool special education teacher said recently, "it's simply about what's fair and what's not fair, and every kid understands that concept."

Boston Police
153 Berkeley Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02116
617-536-6700 Emergency 911

CONFIDENTIAL

PERSONNEL ASSIGNED TO OPERATION SAFETY

DAY 1 DATE Monday, September 8, 1971

BOSTON POLICE	996
M.D.C.	297
STATE POLICE	499
TOTAL	1792

SUPERINTENDENT-IN-CHIEF

By teaching our students to examine documents, to identify the obvious facts, to draw conclusions, and to take positions that they support with evidence, we are equipping them with lifelong tools for becoming active participants in our democracy.

When kids learn, we're all winners. And when they learn the Constitution, we can feel more secure that posterity will preserve and protect our country.

The real stories of the real people and events that have shaped our nation are told in the records of the National Archives. It is the nation's recordkeeper, the warehouse of permanently valuable documents, a steward of democracy. Here you can come to find the essential evidence of our history, including the Constitution and our most sacred and important documents. Although the twelve regional offices of the National Archives may not hold the original true Constitution, every record within those buildings directly relates to it.

For educators and historians, the National Archives offers vast resources for research, and these resources are available for free and unrestricted use. You are welcome to contact any regional office of the National Archives for assistance in locating documents to support your teaching. And if you can't go in person, you can visit online. At the National Archives, we love teachers. We love fieldtrips. We are your source for our nation's history.



To search the National Archives Archival Research Catalog, click here <http://www.archives.gov/research/arc/> To find Morgan v. Hennigan, use ARC Identifier 4713835.

Tallulah Morgan et al v. James W. Hennigan et al Case File, 1972 - 1991; Textual Records from the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts (1789 -); Record Group 21: Records of District Courts of the United States, 1685 - 2004; National Archives at Boston. ARC Identifier 4713835.