

Teacher Notes for Student Study Guide on Brown v. Board of Education Mural

NOTE: When a response is **bolded**, it means that the answer is not directly in the oral history, or it may be correcting the interviewee's information.

In 2018, Kansas artist Michael Young created the Brown v. Board of Education mural, which is located on the third floor of the Kansas Capitol. The painting depicts the legacy of the 1954 landmark U.S. Supreme Court desegregation case that had its roots in Topeka.

Define these terms: Segregation, Separate but Equal,

1. What do you know about this historic case? What was the issue?

That segregated school systems violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. The "separate but equal" doctrine from the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson case was overturned, which had said that as long as black schools and white schools offered the same accommodations, schools could remain segregated.

2. What technique did Michael Young use to increase his painting design to a larger scale instead of a projector? Explain how this process works.

He used the grid method that would divide the surface into equal squares and label them with numbers and letters that corresponded with his original smaller piece.

3. What did Michael Young study at the Salina Vocational Technical School that allowed him to get his first job as an architectural illustrator? Explain this type of art.

Commercial Art is a means to attract a viewer's attention to a product. Images and text are used to communicate the message being sold in a visually appealing manner.

4. Why did Michael Young not use real models for his characters in the painting?

He used the drawing system he learned from Bill Weltman that focused on drawing the rib cage and pelvis first, and he acknowledged that the characters may not be as realistic looking, but he thought they were more unique.

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5. How did Michael Young prepare for the muralist competition?

He started researching and reading about the five legal cases that made up the Brown v. Board lawsuit to gain as much knowledge as possible. He later states that you learn as much as you can, so that later you can 'whittle away' some things and keep the stronger ideas.

6. Michael Young created several different designs before he selected the one with a teacher reading to a mixed group of students. What did he change about the teacher from his original design, and why do you think this was recommended?

*The teacher was originally white. Changing her to black **represented a more diverse world and greater opportunities for everyone, which is what the lawsuit supported.***

7. Why did Michael Young think he had the "right frame of mind" to do this painting? Had he been aware of any incidents of racism when he was in school?

He thought he grew up in a home where his parents were open and did not express racial comments. He remembered two black children in his class at Sacred Heart Grade School, and the teacher telling the students to treat everybody the same.

8. What aspect of the painting catches Michael Young's attention the most?

The eyes, especially the main child's eyes looking with admiration at the teacher.

9. What qualities are needed to be a good teacher?

Patience, Knowledge of Subject, Understanding of Students' Developmental Stages, Humor, Love of Teaching Students, etc.

10. Michael Young deliberately placed several items in the painting that are typical objects with which children would be familiar. Name at least five of those items.

String on the little boy's finger, a band-aid, slingshot, Big Chief tablet, worm in the apple, Crayola crayons, protractor, ruler, globe

11. Why are there protestors on the left side of the painting?

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The history of the painting moves from left to right; the Supreme Court's decision was not supported by everyone. A lot of people who were not in support of the decision were angry and expressed their anger and frustration at the children going to school.

12. Why did he think it was necessary to include the protestors?

He thought it was important to tell the complete story.

13. Why did Michael Young say the right side of the painting was the most important part to him?

It shows the success of the lawsuit. The students who graduated and had gone on to professional careers.

14. Who was Linda Brown, and why would Michael Young want to tell her story to others?

She was the young student who was denied permission to attend her neighborhood school, Sumner Elementary, because it was for white students only. She had to attend a school that was farther away and segregated Monroe Elementary. There were several families in the Topeka suit, but because Brown was the first name listed alphabetically, it became Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.

15. What is the saying on the Supreme Court building where they held the trial and why did Michael Young believe it was important to include this in the painting? What does this phrase mean to you?

*"Equal Justice Under the Law" is what is written on the building. Michael Young thought it was important to show the place where this important trial was held **and that was the issue of the lawsuit.***

16. Why are Sumner Elementary and Monroe Elementary schools in the painting?

These were the two schools in the Brown v Board of Education lawsuit. At the time Linda Brown attended school, Monroe was designated as a school for children of color, and Sumner was designated as a whites-only school.

17. What happened to the teachers at Monroe Elementary after the decision?

They lost their jobs. Nearly 90 percent of Black principals and thousands of teachers lost their jobs between 1954 and the mid-1960s. Due to this decision, schools with high concentrations of Black students were often closed, and Black staff were not rehired in integrated schools. White superintendents and school boards often refused to place Black teachers in positions of authority over white students and teachers.

18. What do the five flags on the right side of the painting represent? Explain.

They are the flags of the four states and federal district (Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, District of Columbia) involved in the Brown case.

If students view both Michael Young and Phyllis Garibay Coons's Kansas Oral Histories, you may want them to compare the artists' backgrounds and how they prepared for the competition. Neither of them started as trained painters. Both artists share that their families and other individuals encouraged their creativity and interest in art. Both mention other experiences that helped to develop their creativity: Michael's was when his teacher shared with him her appreciation of his short story in second grade, and Phyllis mentions the importance of 4-H and her experience on high school newspaper and yearbook staffs. Michael's degree was in commercial art, and Phyllis had a varied background in fine arts. They both shared that the first thing they did when they heard about the mural competitions was to research and try to learn as much as possible about the subject. They both originally came up with several project ideas before settling on one.